


HOW WILL IT END



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MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON



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How Will It End

Sequel to Marguerite's Heritage

By MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

AUTHOR OF

"The Masked Bridal," "Faithful Shirley," "Edrie's
Legacy," "Virgie's Inheritance," "Sibyl's
Influence," Etc.



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CHAPTER I.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

"I have not heard what?" Laurence questioned in a startled tone. "Noel Southworth is not—dead?"

"Dead!" the young wife repeated, with a despairing accent; "it is worse than that."

"What do you mean, Constance?" Laurence exclaimed, with a violent start. Then, as a stifled sob escaped her and he realized that she was laboring under great mental suffering, he added, gently, while he drew her hand within his arm. "Never mind now—do not speak of anything that causes you pain. You are going to Mr. Worthing's, you said. He is an old friend of mine, and I am sure you will allow me to attend you to his house and then see you safely to your own home. I cannot allow you to go back alone after what has just happened."

"I shall be very glad if you will, Laurie, although I am sorry to trouble you," Constance tremulously responded, but with a sense of comfort and security in his presence such as she had not experienced since Noel's flight.

"It will be no trouble—rather a privilege and a pleasure," he answered, kindly. "Ah!" he continued, "here is Mr. Worthing's residence. Shall I go in with you,

Constance, or would you prefer that I should wait for you?"

He feared from her manner that her business with Mr. Worthing might be of a painful nature, and she would be embarrassed by his presence.

"No; come in, Laurence. Surely I can have no reason for trying to hide from you what all the world knows—that I am a deserted wife—that my husband is a defaulter and has fled, leaving me and my child to face our disgrace alone," Constance replied, with exceeding bitterness, as she thought that Laurence Everet could never have been guilty of such weakness.

"Heavens! what a——" Laurence began, involuntarily; then suddenly checking himself, he rang the bell at Mr. Worthing's door.

A servant came to admit them, and said, in reply to Laurence's inquiry, that Mr. Worthing was at home.

They were shown into a small reception room, where the gentleman of the house soon made his appearance, and after greeting Constance with a sympathetic cordiality, which brought the ready tears to her eyes, turned with real pleasure to Laurence.

"This is surely an unexpected treat," he remarked, shaking him warmly by the hand. "When did you arrive?"

"This morning. I ran in to see Phelps, who lives a few doors below you, and was on my way hither to make a call upon you, when I overtook Mrs. Southworth, who is also an old friend of mine. We were neighbors for many years during our youth."

Laurence gave this explanation in an off-hand man-

ner, thinking it best to say nothing just then regarding the exciting adventure in the street.

"Ah!" remarked Mr. Worthing, and suddenly recalling what Laurence had told him about his acquaintance with Constance the day he had asked him to engage Noel Southworth. Then he made some kind inquiries regarding baby Alice and her own health, while he wondered what could have brought her there to see him that evening.

Laurence opened the way for an explanation of this by remarking as he arose from his chair

"I believe Mrs. Southworth has a little matter of business which she desires to talk over with you; so I will just step into your library, Worthing, if you do not mind."

"Certainly, old friend, and make yourself perfectly at home. You know we are always glad to have you come to us——"

"No, do not go, Laurence," Constance here interposed. "I have nothing to say to Mr. Worthing that you may not hear, while I may desire to ask your counsel regarding the matter I am about to submit to him."

Laurence sat down again, thanking her with a look for this evidence of her confidence in him.

"You of course know that my household furniture has been disposed of," Constance continued, turning again to Mr. Worthing.

He bowed and his face fell as it now flashed upon him what the nature of her errand might be.

"The sale has yielded me a little over two thousand dollars," she resumed, "far more than I expected to

realize from it, and yet of course not nearly what it cost in the outset. But I am grateful for this amount, and I have brought you two thousand, Mr. Worthing, as first payment toward the liquidation of the sum which—which was taken from you,” and drawing a large roll of bills from her hand bag, she laid it upon the table beside the gentleman.

Mr. Worthing made a gesture of repulsion.

“Mrs. Southworth, I cannot take it,” he said, greatly disturbed. “I beg that you will not try to assume such a burden. It does not belong to you to do so—you are in no way responsible for—our loss, and, as I have told you before, this money ought to be invested for the benefit of yourself and your child.”

Constance arose and stood before him with an air of conscious dignity.

“Mr. Worthing, you must take the money,” she said in a quiet but decided tone. “It shall not be invested for either me or my child. I will not keep it. I should lose every particle of self respect if I did so, for I cannot use money that has been dishonestly obtained.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Southworth——”

“It is useless for you to argue the point,” she interposed, almost passionately. “I insist upon turning over this amount to you. Far more has been spent upon our home, to say nothing of the costly apparel and many other luxuries which I have enjoyed, and which, unfortunately for my own peace of mind, cannot be turned into money to add to this sum. Can you not understand that I should be perfectly wretched to keep and use this money?” she cried, excitedly. “Lau-

rence," turning to her old friend, "you know something of how I am constituted. Tell him how utterly impossible it is that I could make use of even a single dollar which does not rightly belong to me. My husband," she went on rapidly to explain, "was in the employ of Ames & Worthing—he betrayed their trust—he—secured a large amount of money belonging to them and then disappeared. I do not know whether the whole sum can ever be repaid or not, but this much can be returned, and I utterly refuse to appropriate any portion of it. Tell him, Laurence—make him understand that I cannot retain any portion of it. You may call it morbid pride or anything you choose, but my sense of what is honest and right will not allow me to keep it."

"But what are you going to do, Mrs. Southworth? How are you, who have been so delicately reared, going to provide for your own and your child's needs?" inquired Mr. Worthing, taking his cue from a look which Laurence gave him, and resolving not to excite her further by continued objections to her purpose.

"I am going to work if I can find anything to do," Constance dauntlessly replied. "Ah!" with an eager look at him, "you can perhaps aid me in that, if you will. I will thankfully accept such aid from you, Mr. Worthing, though," with a slight curling of her lip, "after your recent experience it may be a bold request to ask you to recommend any member of my family."

How keenly sensitive she was to the shame of her husband's dishonor! It touched her listeners deeply.

"Pray do not speak thus, Mrs. Southworth," said Mr. Worthing, gently. "I shall be most glad to ren-

der you all the assistance in my power, and I feel that you are a brave and noble woman to take such a stand as this. I will not oppose you further regarding this money, but you must permit me to inquire in a friendly way if you have means sufficient to provide for your present needs."

"Yes," Constance returned, but flushing slightly beneath the direct look which he bent upon her. "I have money enough to take care of us for at least a month."

But she did not tell him that she had been obliged to sell a valuable bracelet—one of Noel's extravagant gifts to her—in order to obtain it.

What she had received from the sale of her furniture, over and above the two thousand dollars just paid to Mr. Worthing, she had had to use to pay the servants and several outstanding bills.

"And have you made any plans regarding your future residence?" Mr. Worthing asked.

"Yes. We are going to board at No. — Geary Street with a widow lady—a Mrs. Knowles, whom I have known for some time. My trunks are already there and she kindly consented to care for Alice while I came here. I gave up the key to my house this afternoon immediately after the sale."

"Ah! I am very glad that you are going to Mrs. Knowles'," Mr. Worthing remarked, the cloud of anxiety lifting from his brow. "I also know her, and I am sure that you will find a safe and pleasant home with her. I will drop you a line in case I find something for you to do, and shall hope to soon be able to

send you good tidings. By the way," he added, suddenly, "what kind of employment would be most congenial to you?"

Constance thought a moment, then answered:

"Writing, I think. I cannot teach or go into an office, because I cannot leave my child at present, and some work which I could do at home would be the most acceptable."

"I will bear that in mind; but in case something promising should offer outside, could you not arrange with Mrs. Knowles to care for your little one during your absence?" Mr. Worthing inquired, for he knew that it would be difficult for her to secure remunerative employment at home.

"Possibly," Constance replied, but the flush on her cheek told that the thought of going out into the world was repugnant to her. "I thank you very much," she added, with simple heartedness as she arose; "and now that my mind is relieved of something of its burden, I must go—home."

Home! Both men felt what mockery there was in that word for her, while Laurence Everet's mind went back to the home of her girlhood, which had been an ideal one, and where she had been most tenderly cared for. What a change for the delicately-reared girl!

Laurence arose also.

"I shall see Mrs. Southworth home, Worthing," he remarked, "and will finish my call upon you some other time."

The suggestive lifting of Mr. Worthing's brow plainly said, "Come back afterward," while the nod

and the smile that curved Laurence's lips gave assent to the invitation.

Laurence and Constance then took their leave, and were soon in a car on their way to the future home of the latter.

They talked upon various subjects—of the many changes in their old home, of Laurence's travels—for he had been abroad again since Constance's marriage—and of the sad tragedy which had deprived her of her parents.

When they alighted to change cars, Constance turned to her companion with touching confidence and remarked:

"Laurence, if you do not mind walking the remainder of the distance with me, I would like to tell you all about my trouble."

The young man's heart leaped within him at this mark of her trust in him.

"I shall not mind the walk in the least, if it will not be too much for you," he cheerfully responded.

"I would like it," she said as she took the arm he offered her, "and I feel, after your kindness to-night and the hints you have received already regarding my recent troubles, that I owe you a full explanation."

"You owe me nothing, Constance," the young man chidingly responded; "but I shall feel honored by your confidence."

Tears started to the young wife's eyes at his kindly tone; then, without further prelude, she told him all that had occurred in connection with her husband's disappearance.

Although she strove to speak of her husband as kindly and extenuatingly as possible, Laurence could plainly perceive that little by little she had been losing faith in him, that her respect for him had been gradually growing less, and that she had not found him the strong support and congenial companion which she had hoped, at the time when she had given him her girlish affection and troth.

He pitied her profoundly, for he knew that it could be no light sorrow for a woman of her high ideals to discover that her idol was of clay, and to be obliged to see it crumbling before her day by day.

He knew that her husband would never be the same to her again; he might some time return to her—she might receive and forgive him, but never again could she look up to him and rely upon him as she had done at first.

She of course did not hint at any such feeling, even if she were conscious of it, but he realized it instinctively, and it made him sad, while at the same time he was thrilled with a strange joy to see with what perfect trust she turned to him in this hour of her need.

She gave him her fullest confidence, as she had been wont to do upon all subjects in those old, happy days at home, and talked freely with him regarding her plans for the future.

She told him that she heard often from Reginald, and that he had begged her to come to him and allow him to take care of her, urging that she would escape much that would be unpleasant in coming abroad, as of course the continual meeting of old friends and ac-

quaintances would be a great trial under the present circumstances.

"But I cannot go to him," Constance said, with a proud uplifting of her head. "My brother has also been unfortunate, and even though he may have a good practice now, I will not be a burden upon any one while I have my health. As for the trial of meeting old friends and acquaintances, those who are 'true blue' will never make me feel uncomfortable, while those who are not will not be worthy the name, and their loss will have to be borne as a part of my burden."

Laurence was deeply moved by these pathetic efforts at resignation, and he longed to gather her into the arms of his love and sympathy and shield her from every trial and unpleasant experience in the future.

But of course he could not do this except indirectly; but as far as he could throw around her safeguards and friendly support he resolved to do so.

"All this has been very hard for you, my friend," he said, earnestly; "and now, for the sake of old times, Constance, will you not rely upon me in every future emergency? If you will not go to Reginald, let me act a brother's part toward you in his stead—tell me when you are troubled and perplexed, and let me smooth your way as much as may be possible."

"You are the same true-hearted Laurence as of old," Constance replied, looking up at him with dewy lashes, "and it has been a great comfort to me to meet you to-night. But for you I should now be in despair, for your timely appearance saved that two thousand dollars and enabled me to materially lighten the burden

which has been crushing me to the earth of late. Debt! debt! Oh, Laurence! I think that debt is something dreadful! Why will young people be so heedless, when for a little selfish gratification they have to become bound servants to pay for it, and perhaps even criminals and exiles? while a debt entailed in such a way as this— It is enough to crush one to the earth!” she concluded, passionately.

“But, my dear friend, you are in no way responsible for the wrong which your husband has done. I wish you might realize this,” Laurence said, earnestly.

“Perhaps I am not in the eyes of the law,” Constance thoughtfully returned, “but there is a moral law which holds one bound. I married Noel for better or for worse, I promised to share his burdens and cares, and I shall never rest until every dollar of this money is paid. People shall at least respect the name of Noel Southworth’s wife and child—they shall learn that it was not through my extravagance and selfishness, as the cruel papers said, that he was driven to the commission of such a deed.”

Laurence groaned in spirit over this speech.

“What a wretch the man must be—what a coward—to desert a wife like this and leave her to face the consequence of his crime, and she a hundredfold more delicately constituted and sensitive than he!”

He could well understand how every quivering nerve had been rudely strung to its utmost tension by the fearful ordeal through which she had passed.

“Constance, you must not allow this trouble to depress you so,” he pleaded; “you will soon sink under it

if you do. If you feel this obligation to Ames & Worthing so keenly, why will you not let me cancel it for you? I have an abundance, and no one in the world depending upon me. As you know, perhaps, I have recently come into an independent fortune through the death of my mother's only brother. Constance, let me do this brotherly act for you, and thus relieve you of at least a part of your burden."

CHAPTER II.

PROFESSOR GARDINER IS INTRODUCED.

"Laurie, I cannot," Constance exclaimed, tremulously. "It is like you—like your native nobleness and generosity to propose it, but I must not accept such a sacrifice from you."

"It would be no sacrifice—rather a pleasure," Laurence said, earnestly. "But why—why do you shrink from indebtedness to me, any more than to Ames & Worthing? Let me lift this burden from you—let me so far vindicate you in the eyes of the world as to have it said that the money which Noel Southworth took from his firm has all been returned."

"It would really amount to nothing, Laurence," Constance sadly returned, "although it is very, very good of you; but the debt would remain the same, and the fact that my husband has been guilty of a crime would also remain. The stain cannot be eradicated nor the reproach that has been cast at me erased until I can work my own way out of it."

Laurence could but acknowledge the force of her reasoning, yet, while he admired the sturdy resolution of this brave little woman, he was deeply disappointed that she would not accept the aid that he had offered.

When at last they reached Constance's boarding place, Laurence shook her warmly by the hand and

asked if he might use an old friend's prerogative and call upon her occasionally.

She readily granted his request, and after bidding her a reluctant good-night, he left her, and then, with a keen sense of desolation creeping over her, Constance sought the one room that for the present was to be her home.

It was long before she could sleep, however. This unexpected meeting with her old friend had aroused so many memories, both pleasant and painful, that the floodgates were unlocked, and she wept with the wildest abandon far into the small hours of the morning.

Laurence after leaving Constance returned to the home of his friend, where he learned more of the circumstances regarding Noel Southworth's defalcation.

He had conducted himself in the most exemplary manner during the first year of his connection with the firm, Mr. Worthing told him, while they considered his mathematical capacity as something remarkable. They could always submit the most complicated accounts to him and feel sure that they would be rendered with absolute correctness, and they had regarded him as a valuable acquisition and had trusted him more implicitly than they were in the habit of trusting new clerks, while after the first six months of his service they had made him a handsome advance in salary.

"If he had only been content to live within his means he would have been all right and eventually attained a high position," Mr. Worthing continued. "But he is a fellow of expensive and luxurious tastes, a devotee of society with a growing love for drink,

and thus money slipped through his fingers like water through a sieve. I began to fear some time ago that he was getting beyond his depth, for he frequently drew a large portion of his salary in advance. He had seemed depressed and absent-minded for two or three weeks previous to his flight, but apparently his duties were faithfully discharged, and so I attributed it to some other cause.

"When I learned that he had left San Francisco I was dumfounded, and immediately feared the worst. Inquiry outside only served to develop the fact that he was deeply in debt; so doubtless he reasoned that since he must become a target for the arrows of the public, he might as well line his pockets to some purpose, therefore he appropriated a large amount which had to pass through his hands and then skipped."

"The weak, selfish coward!" Laurence ejaculated, with a contemptuous curl of his lips. "I have always feared that he would do something to break the heart of that lovely wife of his. He never was worthy of her. What a wretch to leave her in such an indifferent way to face the shame and disgrace alone!"

"That is so, Everet, and she is a rare little woman—so delicate and refined, yet with the soul of a martyr," Mr. Worthing responded, warmly.

"True, and I am surprised at the fortitude which she displays," Laurence said, with ill-concealed emotion. "I have known Constance Alexander all my life, and while I have always realized her goodness and purity, I did not think she possessed the strength of character to rise above such trouble in the way she appears to be

doing. Noel Southworth I knew slightly at college, and from the first I was unfavorably impressed by him. When I learned that he was to marry my old friend I feared for her. There were lines of weakness in his face which made me believe he would always consider his own interests and pleasures before duty to her or others. Then, too, a circumstance occurred the night previous to his marriage which made me doubt his honor," and Laurence related his interview with the unknown woman by the brook side.

"That was a very strange occurrence!" his companion remarked. "Do you think she could have been some girl whom he had wronged?"

"I have always feared so, for she seemed heart-broken and almost desperate; but she was a perfect lady in manner, bearing and language. She was tall and finely formed, and I imagine beautiful, although I could not distinguish her features in the darkness.

"Really, Everet, that was quite a romantic adventure!" said Mr. Worthing, glancing keenly at his friend's grave face, "but I suppose you have no idea who she was nor where she came from?"

"No. I have never seen her since, to my knowledge, yet I often wondered just what her relations toward Southworth could have been. But," with a deep sigh, "I am now more concerned to know what the future holds for his deserted wife. By the way, Worthing, I wish you would let me make up to you the loss that you have sustained through him."

"Why should you wish to assume such an obligation?" inquired his friend, regarding him intently.

"Well, for one thing, you employed him at my suggestion or request, and I cannot help feeling in a measure responsible for his conduct; at all events, it has made me very uncomfortable."

"Pshaw, man, that is one of the fortunes of trade, and we expect now and then to meet with losses," Mr. Worthing responded, lightly, "only," he added, gravely, "the worst of it is, a loss of this kind rather destroys one's confidence in human nature."

"That is true. But, Worthing, really, for the sake of my old friendship for Constance Alexander, I wish you would let me cancel this debt—as she regards it," Laurence persisted.

"What difference can it make, Everet, whether she owes the money to us or to you? If I read the woman aright, she is very proud and sensitive, and will never accept as a gift from any one the liquidation of what has been dishonestly obtained.

"I'm afraid she will not," Laurence answered, gloomily. "It is a matter of principle with her, but it is terrible to think of her assuming such a burden."

"It is indeed," his friend assented. Then he added in a lighter tone: "There is only one way I can think of to remedy the evil."

Laurence glanced up inquiringly.

"And that is," Mr. Worthing resumed, "for the law to free her from her marriage vows to that scamp, when perhaps you——"

"Worthing!" cried Laurence, springing to his feet, his face flushed and almost convulsed with pain, while

his friend was dismayed to think that he had so heedlessly probed a still unhealed wound.

"Forgive me, Laurence," he said, contritely. "This sad affair is by no means a proper subject for jest under any circumstances, and I would not have pained you so for the world—believe me."

"You are forgiven," the young man returned in a low tone, his face now white with suppressed emotion; "but of course it is of no use for me to attempt to conceal my secret from you now."

"I am afraid I have surprised it from you. I am very sorry," Arthur Worthing regretfully said.

"Perhaps it is just as well," Laurence replied, more calmly, "for now I can converse with you more freely. I have loved Constance Alexander ever since we were children together; indeed, I grew up with the belief and hope that she would some day be my wife. I never openly avowed my affection for her nor sought to bind her by any promise, for somehow I took it for granted that she understood me and reciprocated my love; besides, I felt sure that her parents would not approve of any engagement until her education was completed. I did intend to come to some mutual understanding as soon as I left college, but I was obliged to hasten my departure abroad, and when I went to take leave of her she was ill and I could not see her alone. So I had to go with my love unconfessed. I thought it would not make very much difference, I felt so secure. It was a fatal security, however, and during my absence Constance met Noel Southworth. He won the heart I so coveted, and

upon my return I found her lost to me forever. I was stunned—crushed for a time; the blow seemed to sap my very life, and I was long in recovering even the semblance of resignation. But I have believed that she was perfectly happy—that she was devotedly attached to her husband, and I have tried to drown my own misery in travel and sightseeing. You can, perhaps, imagine something of what my feelings were to-night when I learned that her husband had become a criminal and deserted her. It burst upon me like a bomb, and for an instant the thought which you have just suggested forced itself upon me—"The law would free her from the coward who had been so unfaithful to his marriage vows. Why could I not gather the stricken one to my heart and shield her from all future sorrow?" But, my friend"—and the young man's voice sounded strangely sad and hopeless—"I do not believe that can be. Such relations cannot be lightly broken, and I should not dare to suggest anything of the kind to Constance—at least, for a long time to come. I will be her faithful friend—her brother. I will try to shield her from every possible trial. But I see now that I cannot assume this debt without perhaps making her feel the weight of obligation to me more heavily than to you. But let us talk no more of this now," Laurence continued, trying to throw off the sadness that oppressed him. "Constance's future must be provided for. She looks worn and haggard now, and unless her mind is relieved and a way opened for her to support herself and her child, I fear that she will soon break down."

"Yes, she looks delicate, and I will see what I can do for her right away. She thinks that writing of some kind would be the most congenial employment."

"I believe she could do that better than anything else, for Constance writes a beautiful hand. Stay! I imagine I know of just the position for her!" Laurence exclaimed, with sudden animation.

"Well, I do not see but that you are going to be her good genius, after all," his friend smilingly returned.

"I met a scientific gentleman during my trip hither," Laurence continued; "in fact, we traveled nearly all the way from New York together. His name is Gardiner. He is preparing an important work to be published the coming year, and one day, while telling me something about his book, he remarked that he hoped he should find no trouble in securing a competent amanuensis here, as it would seriously inconvenience him to get behindhand with his manuscript."

"That will be the very position for Mrs. Southworth!" Mr. Worthing eagerly exclaimed. "You must see this Mr. Gardiner immediately, Everet, and try to secure it for her. Where is the gentleman stopping?"

"With some friends on Hayes Street. I have his address in my memorandum book. I will call upon him to-morrow morning and see if I cannot prevail upon him to give Constance a trial. And this reminds me that I must go back to my hotel," Laurence interposed, rising, "for I have letters to write which must go in the first mail."

"Well, let me know the result of your interview, for

"I feel very anxious to get Mrs. Southworth soon settled in some good position," Mr. Worthing replied.

"I will do so," Laurence answered; then the two friends shook hands and parted.

Laurence hurried back to his hotel and wrote his letters, after which he retired, but not to sleep, for, as with Constance, old memories had been revived, the old wound reopened, and a thousand harrowing questions arose in his mind and kept him tossing and turning continually upon his pillow.

Had Constance been happy during her married life? had she ever loved her husband with a depth of affection such as he—Laurence—felt for her—such as she was capable of feeling for a good, true man? Suppose that Noel Southworth should return to her: could she forgive and receive him back? Would she feel it to be her duty to welcome the wanderer home, condone his offenses, and share his life again?

These were some of the thoughts which drove sleep from his eyes and wrought him up to a perfect fever of excitement.

When morning broke he was almost as wan and hollow-eyed as Constance had been the previous night.

After he had had his breakfast and looked over the morning paper he went out to seek his late traveling companion, Professor Gardiner.

He was fortunate in finding him at home, and upon sending up his card the professor came immediately to him and greeted him most cordially.

After chatting socially for a few moments Laurence broached the object of his call, and he was both

touched and gratified to perceive how quickly the gentleman's sympathies were enlisted in Constance's behalf.

"Deserted. Her husband a defaulter! Poor child!" he exclaimed, feelingly. "A little one, too, on her hands to be cared for, and no means at her command! Really, my young friend, it is a sad case. And have you known the poor lady long?"

"All my life, sir. Her father's estate and that of mine adjoined, and we were neighbors for twenty years. Mrs. Southworth's family was an eminently respectable one—wealthy, too; but when the —— & —— Railroad collapsed Mr. Alexander lost everything," Laurence explained.

"Ah! yes. Plenty of people got their pocket cleaned out at that time," his companion remarked, with a wise shake of his head. "And so you would like to give this Mrs. Southworth a trial as amanuensis," he added, thoughtfully. "How about her handwriting?"

Laurence had of course expected this question, and as he had jealously preserved every letter that Constance had written to him, he had come prepared to show what she could do in the way of chirography.

He drew a letter from his pocket and quietly passed it to the professor.

"There is a note which she wrote to me several years ago. It may serve to give you some idea of what she can do now," he remarked.

"Hum!" said Professor Gardiner, adjusting his spectacles; "very neat, clear and legible, and with a coarse pen, if she is a rapid writer, she might do very well. I

think I would like to meet your friend, Mr. Everet, as early as you can make it convenient. I must get at my work immediately, and shall need some one to assist me."

"I will bring Mrs. Southworth to you or take you to her—whichever may suit your convenience the best—and as soon as you please," Laurence replied.

"Then to-morrow morning, about this time. I shall be obliged to you if you will bring her to my office, No. 13 Post Street. My time is so precious to me just now that I have not much to spend in going about," said the professor.

"Thank you," Laurence remarked, as he arose to go. "I will do as you wish, and allow me to say that I am grateful for the interest you have shown in my unfortunate friend."

He went immediately from Professor Gardiner to Constance.

He found her looking pale and worn, with great, dark circles under her eyes, which betrayed the weeping of the night.

She smiled when she opened her door and saw Laurence, but so sadly that it made his heart ache, while he was alarmed to feel how hot and dry was the hand she gave him in greeting.

"I am afraid that you are ill—that the excitement of last evening was too much for you!" he said as he searched her face anxiously.

"No, I am not ill, but I did not sleep well. Come in, Laurence, and let me show you my baby," she hastily added, to turn his attention from her, and calling Alice

to her, she made her shake hands with him and wish him "good-morning."

Laurence told her at once the nature of his errand, and she nearly broke down upon learning that there was a prospect of immediate employment for her.

She thanked him gratefully for his thoughtfulness and promised to be ready when he should call to take her to the professor on the morrow.

He sat a while chatting with her, trying to cheer her by relating some amusing incidents that occurred during his recent westward trip, and finally took his leave, feeling somewhat lighter of heart after hearing her laugh outright at some quaint remark which Alice made to him.

CHAPTER III.

"LOVE HAS DIED!"

The next morning Laurence called at the appointed hour to take Constance to meet Professor Gardiner.

She was ready and waiting for him, and looked brighter and more hopeful, the young man thought, than she had seemed on the previous day.

They found Professor Gardiner in his office, and as Constance was introduced to him she found herself looking into the kind, pleasant face of a man of about fifty years of age.

His hair was gray, almost white, his features somewhat massive and showing traces of deep thought.

His eyes were large, dark and very expressive, and Constance found herself wondering where she had seen such eyes before. His mouth showed gentleness of disposition, while the square, shapely chin indicated strong individuality and resolution.

It was a grand, an intellectual face, and yet it impressed the young wife as being strangely sad as well.

There was a pathetic droop about the tender mouth which seemed to indicate that at some time in his life he, too, had known deep sorrow; his eyes also had the look of one who had seen some of his dearest hopes shattered, his brightest joys cut off in their prime.

But when he smiled all this disappeared, and his

whole countenance lighted up with a soft radiance that was peculiarly attractive.

When he greeted Constance he retained her hand in his and studied her face for a few moments with an earnest, kindly scrutiny.

Then he smiled, and remarked in a rich, musical voice:

"So, Mrs. Southworth, you are Mr. Everet's friend, whom he recommended for the position of amanuensis. Can you write rapidly?"

"I would not like to claim anything for myself, Professor Gardiner," Constance modestly replied, "for I have never had any experience in such work as you require. The only thing I can promise you is that if you see fit to give me a trial I will do my utmost to please you. I must work," she added, lifting her grave, sad eyes to his, "to support myself and my child, and so whatever employment I may find, I shall exert myself to do my best."

"That is a praiseworthy resolve, and it certainly ought to bring you success," the professor returned, with a kind smile; then added: "Now if you will please give me a specimen of your handwriting I shall be better able to judge whether you will do for me. Sit down here," and he placed a chair before a desk, "and be kind enough to write a sentence which I will dictate to you."

Constance drew off her glove, seated herself, took up a pen, dipped it in the ink and waited for further instructions.

He gave her about five lines in a distinct, business-

like tone Concentrating her whole mind upon her task, she quickly reproduced them in a clear, legible hand and then passed the sentence to him for examination.

"Well," he remarked, with a satisfied air, after glancing at it, "I can almost read that without my glasses. I shall surely give you a trial, Mrs. Southworth," and turning to Laurence, "I thank you heartily for saving me a good deal of trouble and annoyance by providing me with a copyist at such short notice."

Constance thought it was exceedingly tactful of him to make it appear as if the obligation were all on his side, and she believed that she should very much enjoy working for one who was so courteous and appreciative.

"Nay," Laurence returned, "it is you who are kind in so readily acceding to my proposal to meet Mrs. Southworth, and if the agreement only proves to be mutually agreeable, I shall be very much gratified."

"When can you come to me, Mrs. Southworth?" Professor Gardiner inquired, with a business-like air.

"Immediately, if you desire," Constance returned, but feeling a trifle disappointed that she would not be able to take her work home.

"To-morrow at nine?" he said, inquiringly.

"Yes, sir."

"That is well, as my work presses, and I warn you beforehand that for the present I shall keep you very busy," the gentleman returned, with a smile.

"I shall be glad to be busy," Constance answered,

repressing a sigh, as with a glance of inquiry at Laurence she arose to go.

It would be a great relief, she thought, to have her mind so employed that she would have little time to think of her own trouble. It was dreadful! Such endless thinking—wondering where Noel could be, what he was doing, why he had left her in such a cruel way and still kept her in such a wretched suspense, speculating as to what the future might hold for both him and her, and whether they would ever meet each other again. It kept her in a nervous, excited condition most of the time, wearing upon her during the day and depriving her of needed rest at night.

The professor bent a kind and sympathetic glance upon her, for he well knew why she would be glad to be busy.

He saw that she was very delicately organized—that her recent sorrow had worn upon her sadly, and he felt that it would be good for her to have employment.

“I will give her enough to do to keep her from worrying over the heartless wretch who deserted her in such a dastardly manner,” he mused as the door closed after his callers. “The work will at least serve to change the current of her thoughts during the day.”

Then, with a heavy sigh that was almost a groan, he exclaimed:

“Oh, God! Every one has his burden of sorrow! Why, why in this beautiful world which Thou hast made should there be so much of heart misery? Ah! the mystery of grief—who can ever solve it? The

poor little woman's sad face has brought my own past all back to me. 'Twas a wise provision that man must win his bread by the sweat of his brow, since but for my work heart and brain must long since have failed me."

He sat down before his desk, and bowing his head upon his hand, surrendered himself to the troubled thoughts which seemed to come surging over him.

Constance went home feeling greatly cheered at the prospect of work.

It was true that nothing had been said about remuneration for her services, but this did not trouble her, for she felt that Professor Gardiner was an honorable gentleman. She had been instantly attracted toward him, and she was sure that she could trust him to give her whatever her work might be worth, and he could not, of course, tell how much it would be right to pay her until he had tested her ability.

Laurence accompanied her to her door, and as he shook hands with her he remarked that he should drop in upon her occasionally, as he should be interested to know what success she would have as an amanuensis.

"Are you going to remain in San Francisco long?" Constance inquired, with a wistful look in her eyes.

She felt so friendless, so alone in that great city, with so much responsibility resting upon her, that the thought of his probable return to New York made her doubly sad.

He read something of her thoughts in her eager glance, and his resolution was instantly taken.

He would remain where he was to watch over her

while she was in such sore need of care and friendship.

"Yes, for a long time, Constance," he replied. "I have business which will detain me here indefinitely."

"I am very glad," she responded, simply, yet heartily. "It seems so good to see the face of an old friend, and even if we should not meet very often, the knowledge that you are here will be a comfort to me."

His heart thrilled at her words, and the suggestion which his friend Worthing had made to him the previous evening forced itself upon his mind with strong temptation.

But he resolutely put it from him, well knowing that such a thought had never entered the mind of the noble woman before him, and promising to see her again ere long, he bade her good-morning and went his way.

The next morning, promptly at nine, Constance entered the office of Professor Gardiner.

She had arranged with Mrs. Knowles for the care of Alice during her absence, and as the woman was a motherly soul, she felt perfectly safe in leaving the child with her.

The professor greeted her very cordially, and she was soon busily writing under his direction upon subjects so profound as to drive every other thought from her mind.

He was so enthusiastic and absorbed in his work that she could not fail to catch something of his spirit, and so gave herself up to it with an interest and heartiness that delighted him, and he congratulated himself upon having secured such a prize.

While Constance could not be said to be happy in her new employment, she at least was far less wretched than she had been, for there is no peace for an aching heart like steady, systematic work.

She and her employer soon became the best of friends. A bond of sympathy had seemed to be established between them from the first, and it was not long before she voluntarily confided to him the whole story of her trouble.

He was so kind and fatherly in his interest and compassion for her, so tender and considerate of her feelings, that she found her heart considerably lightened of its burden by her trust in him.

One morning on entering the office she found her friend greatly excited over a domestic scandal that he had just been reading about in the paper.

"The man is a brute and his wife is justified in seeking a divorce from him," he remarked with considerable warmth after explaining the nature of the case to her.

"Are you an advocate of the divorce law, Professor Gardiner?" Constance gravely inquired.

"Not under ordinary circumstances, my child," he replied. "I believe that marriage is a divine institution, and that husband and wife should cleave to each other through sickness and trouble, through poverty and misfortune; but if either is unfaithful to the other, we have the sanction of the Bible for divorce, while I also maintain that in the event of abuse, cruelty, wilful neglect or desertion on either side, the parties are justified in seeking a separation. But with the

petty excuses and pleas regarding incompatibility of temperament and the numberless other shifts of small, mean souls to get rid of each other and the responsibilities they have heedlessly assumed, I have no patience, and I have nothing but contempt for those rascally lawyers who rob such weak-minded fools by their sophistry and trickery. In your own case, my dear child, if you will pardon me for being personal," the professor added, after a few moments of thought, "I feel that you would be perfectly justified in seeking a divorce from your husband."

Constance made a gesture of aversion at this remark, and her face grew pale from pain.

"The thought is repulsive to you, I perceive," her friend continued; "but truly, my dear child, a man who could desert a faithful little woman like you is not worthy of her and should never have it in his power to claim her allegiance again."

Some one entered the outer office just at this point, but the professor was so intent upon his subject that he did not hear either the opening or closing of the door, and he continued:

"Noel Southworth, according to my way of thinking, has forfeited all right and title to your wifely devotion. His must be a very weak and cowardly nature or he never could have forsaken you and his only child as he has, leaving no trace behind him, making no provision for you, when he must have known that you would be left unprotected and absolutely destitute, that you would be obliged to labor for the bread you ate or starve. I speak warmly and

plainly, my little friend. I feel deeply upon the subject. I cannot express the contempt which I feel for the man who has in my estimation wronged you beyond reparation."

"And so you would advise me to seek a divorce from my husband?" Constance asked, white to the lips from the conflicting emotions which the professor's words had aroused within her.

"I would—indeed I would," he answered, earnestly. "Were you my own daughter, I should want you to be free from him."

"To what end?" Constance inquired in a constrained tone.

"To be free from him, as I have said; to secure yourself against his power in the event of his return, and to enable you to perhaps become a happier woman in the future."

Constance looked up at him with a start.

"Do you think it right for a divorced person to marry again?" she exclaimed.

"Why not," he asked, "if a woman has not found her true mate and the man whom she married has proved unfaithful to her? Noel Southworth, if I have understood his character aright, was never worthy of you. You are his superior, both mentally and morally, and also in the delicacy of your organization. Your nature is lofty, you are conscientious to a fault, your tastes and sympathies and sensibilities are exquisite. Excuse me for being so personal, but this is as I have read you, and it is not merely what you have acquired, either; these qualities were born in you, and you have

enhanced them by cultivation. On the other hand, your husband was naturally weak, selfish, egotistical, without regard for his moral obligations, lacking even in natural affection. I would not wound you, my child, for the world, and I should never have presumed to speak so freely to you if you had not voluntarily given me your confidence. But a man who could deliberately win your true, noble heart and then ruthlessly toss it aside as a thing of no value should never have the right to call you wife again or even to enter your presence, if I could have my wish," the professor concluded, earnestly.

"But when I married Noel Southworth I promised to be faithful to him until death should part us," said Constance, solemnly.

"Death has parted you in one sense," her friend responded, impressively—"love has died!"

"Love has died!" Constance repeated, turning to him a blank, white face.

"Look into your heart and see," was the grave reply. "You have been most cruelly wounded. Can that wound heal and leave no scar? You cannot love your husband to-day with the same confidence and devotion as when you married him, believing him to be all that he appeared. You cannot even respect him——"

"Oh, Professor Gardiner!" the young wife cried, aghast, and then burst into passionate weeping.

"Ah, poor child! poor child!" the man exclaimed in a voice of dismay. "I would not have pained you thus for the world! Forget it—forget it, and I promise

never to refer to the subject again. I was thoughtless, unfeeling, cruel——”

“Oh, no, you are not,” she returned, making an effort at self control as she saw how unhappy he was. “You have not wounded me. I did not give way because of that—I was only startled to realize—Oh, Professor Gardiner!” and again Constance lapsed into uncontrollable tears.

The man looked puzzled for a moment, then light seemed to break in upon him. He nodded intelligently once or twice, then, hearing some movement in the other room, he went out to ascertain what had caused it, thus leaving Constance alone.

He found Laurence Everet quietly seated in the outer office, a grave, somewhat disturbed look on his handsome face, and he knew instantly that he must have overheard a part, if not the whole, of his conversation with Constance.

“You have heard?” he said, inquiringly, as he quietly shook hands with him.

The young man nodded gravely.

“I’m afraid I’ve said more than I ought to,” the professor remarked, with an uneasy shrug of his shoulders; “but upon my word I believe I have given the conscientious little woman an insight to her own heart.”

“Do you think so?” Laurence eagerly asked.

“I feel sure of it. How can she either love or respect the coward who has so wronged her? Her startled exclamation and emotion when I told her that she could not, proved to me that I had opened her eyes

to the fact. Poor little woman! It is a hard case that she should be left to shift for herself. She is a refined and cultivated lady and fitted to occupy a high position in the world.

"How is she getting on with her work?" Laurence inquired.

Professor Gardiner's face beamed at this question.

"She works like a little steam engine," he said. "It is astonishing what energy such delicate women sometimes develop when necessity drives them to work. I shall not be able to keep her busy at this rate, and her copy is almost as clear as print."

"Then she is giving you satisfaction?" Laurence remarked in a gratified tone.

"Perfect; only it makes my heart sore to see her toiling on day after day as if her life depended upon it," said the professor, with a sigh. "I have offered to give her half a day every week, but she will not take it, and the weather is beginning to get so warm I am afraid she will break down unless she takes some rest."

"I called to invite her to drive with me this evening," Laurence remarked; "but if her work is not driving, perhaps you might be willing to spare her for the afternoon."

"Yes, indeed," heartily returned his companion. "It will do her a world of good and be a relief to my conscience if she will go. I will ask her this minute," and without further ceremony the kind man disappeared within his private office.

Presently he returned, his face beaming.

"She will go," he said, brightly, "and you may call for her whenever you like."

"Thank you. Let it be two o'clock, then," Laurence said, rising to go.

He would have liked to see Constance, but thought she might feel delicate about meeting him with her eyes red from weeping, and so would not ask for an interview.

But his heart was filled with various emotions as he went away. He had heard nearly all that had passed between her and Professor Gardiner, and this, with what that gentleman had told him, aroused all his old love for Constance and something of hope that the time might yet come when she would be his.

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCIPLE VERSUS LOVE.

Laurence called for Constance promptly at two and found her ready, with the exception of her hat and gloves.

These were soon donned, however, and with a brighter face than usual, in anticipation of the afternoon's pleasure, she went down to the carriage.

"This is very good of you, Laurence," she said as they drove away. "You are always planning something nice for me."

"You forget, Constance, that I am almost a stranger in San Francisco, and so it is no light boon to me to enjoy the society of an old friend now and then, so pray do not assume that the obligation is all on your side," Laurence smilingly replied.

"That is a very kind way of putting it. You were always thoughtful and considerate," Constance returned, with a little sigh, as she recalled the efforts he used to make for her pleasure in the old, happy days at home.

"I do not like to see you growing so pale and thin," the young man gravely remarked. "You ought to be out doors more. Professor Gardiner says you are working unnecessarily hard. Why do you apply yourself so closely?"

"I must. I have to do it to keep from—thinking," she responded, with a note of keen pain in her tone. Then, with a searching glance at him, she added: "You were in the office this morning, Laurence, while—the professor and I were talking?"

"Yes."

"Then you must have overheard——"

"I am sorry that I did, Constance, if it pains you to know it," Laurence said, regretfully.

"Of course I am glad it was you rather than some stranger; but oh! it was dreadful!" she cried, flushing a painful crimson.

"What was dreadful, Constance?" Laurence gently asked.

"That—that Professor Gardiner should think that I had lost all—all respect for my—for Noel," she faltered.

Laurence made no response to this, and after a moment she resumed:

"Of course I know that he has done very wrong, and it is a great shock to discover that one whom we have trusted has—has made a great mistake. But some natures cannot resist temptation as easily as others, and I think that one should try to judge such people charitably. Even the strongest are liable to fall under certain conditions. Every one has weak points."

Laurence gazed at her with admiration, almost reverence.

How nobly she was trying to defend the man who had so basely wronged her! How she seemed to

yearn to have others judge him kindly, and yet it seemed to him as if she were thus trying to fortify her own waning respect for him and to silence, by this vindication, her own convictions of the truth of what Professor Gardiner had told her that morning.

"What a forgiving nature you have, Constance!" Laurence remarked. "And yet I, too, feel with the professor that Noel Southworth has forfeited all right to your affection and esteem—all right to your allegiance."

"Laurence!" the young wife began, lifting a startled glance to him.

"Listen a moment," he interposed, leaning nearer to her and speaking with thrilling earnestness. "Now that we are talking of this let me open my heart to you. I love you still. The love I confessed to you only **three weeks** previous to your marriage is as strong and true as it was then—yes, even stronger. I long to see you happy. I long to lift you out of this life of drudgery and service—to see you occupy your true position in the world. If your love and respect for your husband have died under his culpable treatment of you; if you could give me even a little of the affection which I feel for you; if you could be willing to let the law set you free, as Professor Gardiner suggested this morning, I should feel so happy—so richly blessed in being allowed to take you into my heart and shield you and Alice from all care or sorrow. My darling, could you consent to this—could you consent to become my honored, my cherished wife? Do not answer me now," he went on, hurriedly, as he noticed

how pale she had grown, "if the thought is so new that it startles and shocks you. Take time to think it all over calmly, and tell me later your decision. Oh, my love, it pains me more than I can tell you—it galls me—makes me almost desperate at times to know that you are toiling beyond your strength for your daily bread when I have an abundance, and yet no right to share it with you and thus relieve you of your burden. Come to me, Constance, if you can. Let us be happy. Let me try to make you happy and help your rear and educate Alice and give her advantages which I know you must desire for her. My words seem tame in comparison with what what my heart feels. Oh! if I could only lay it bare before you and let you read its most secret page, you would find it written over with intensest love and reverence for you. Constance, if you will let me institute the necessary proceedings to free you, you shall learn that there are truth and honor and devotion that will never fail you."

There was a long silence after Laurence ceased this impassioned declaration—a silence during which the hearts of both were torn with conflicting emotions.

At last Constance lifted a grave, earnest look to her companion's face—a look which made him flush a conscious crimson.

"Laurence, you know that I cannot," she said in a tone of quiet firmness. "Even while you ask it you know that it would not be right for me to consent to such a step—that even should I yield to you there would always be a sense of wrong that could not fail to mar the future for us. As I told Professor Gardi-

ner this morning, I promised before God that I would be faithful to Noel Southworth until death should part us. I took those vows upon myself in all sincerity, and I cannot break them. I do not believe in, and could never consent to a divorce except under certain circumstances."

"What circumstances, Constance?" Laurence eagerly inquired.

"The desertion for another of either husband or wife."

"You surely have suffered desertion."

"Not of the kind I refer to; I will trust and believe," Constance said, flushing. "And, Laurence, even if Noel had left me to go away with another woman, I should not feel free to marry again while he was living. I might feel willing to seek a legal separation from him, but while he lived I could call no other man husband. You know that I am right, you believe this as firmly as I, only you have allowed your feelings for me to carry you beyond yourself," she concluded, earnestly, with an appealing glance at him.

He could not deny the truth of her words. He knew that she was right, only he did so long to make her life easier and to see her happy that he was almost willing to sacrifice principle for her sake.

"I have no toleration," she resumed, after a moment, "for the license, the free thinking—the 'advanced thought,' as some people are pleased to call it—of this age. People marry heedlessly and then separate for a mere whim. The divine ordinance of marriage, the most sacred family relations are violated

nowadays upon the most trifling pretext or caprice. God's law is mocked, men and women are dishonored, and dishonor themselves by taking advantage of the divorce law, which leads vast numbers of people into crime and causes untold misery. And so I feel that all true people should sternly set their faces against it. No, Laurence, I could not consent to any such step. I should never respect myself if I should break my vows simply to secure my own ease and happiness. Ah! it would not be happiness, for there would always be the sting of conscious wrongdoing in it. Tell me truly, Laurence, are not these your views also?" she concluded, lifting her clear, earnest eyes to his.

"I know that you are right, Constance," he said in a low tone after a moment of hesitation, "and I beg that you will forgive me for presuming to propose anything so obnoxious to your principles."

"I have nothing to forgive, for I know that your motives were good and pure. You are noble and true, and I feel richly blessed in the possession of such a friend as you have always been to me, Laurie," Constance returned with something of her told-time frankness and brightness. "But, truly," she added, "it sometimes seems to me as if the world is being turned upside down by the license of the present day. I have been greatly shocked by something which recently occurred in our own circle. A man occupying a high position, and one whom every one trusted and looked up to as being especially conscientious and worthy, has lately left his wife, with whom he has lived for twenty years. His reason is simply 'incompatibility of tem-

perament' and the fact that he has ceased to love her, while he has become infatuated with a woman who keeps a fashionable boarding house. He has applied for a divorce, and when it is obtained these two are going East to make another home."

"Can it be possible?" Laurence exclaimed. "Are you sure that there is no more serious reason for his apparent unfaithfulness?"

"Yes, for his wife says that until this recent change in him they have always lived harmoniously, and she loves him still, in spite of all. She has been faithful to him through sickness and sorrow, and even toiled with her own hands to assist him through serious financial difficulties. She is nearly heartbroken over it and the shame of the scandal."

"One would suppose that this other woman would hardly dare trust herself with one who could be so cruel and unfaithful," Laurence observed.

"I am told that they both claim it to be a sin for a man to live with a woman whom he does not love, and that when people come to more clearly understand this new doctrine, the so-called advanced thought of which they are disciples, there will be radical changes in the world. And so, Laurence, I feel that every good man and woman should set their faces as a flint against all such fallacious reasoning. God's Word distinctly commands that husband and wife shall cleave unto one another; but if for any reason they should separate, they are to remain unmarried as long as they both live. I believe my Bible, Laurie, and I must abide by its

decrees. I shall be faithful to my vows to Noel while he lives."

"But if——" Laurence began, eagerly, and then checked himself.

He knew that he should not ask the question that had been upon his lips; but his almost idolatrous love for Constance nearly mastered his judgment for the moment.

Constance shot a startled glance at him, and the rich blood surged up to her brow.

Something seemed to tell her what he would have said, and the half-uttered question suddenly revealed to her the fact that as Laurence Everet's loved and honored wife she could be supremely happy, and for the first time she realized her great mistake—what she had lost years ago when she had failed to rightly interpret his regard for her.

"But if Noel Southworth should ever return to you," said Laurence, quickly recovering himself and changing the form of his sentence, "would you feel that you must receive him back again?"

Constance became so pale at this that he instantly reproached himself for having asked the question.

"Yes," she said, after a momentary struggle with herself, "I believe I should feel it to be my duty. It might be his salvation, you know. He has sinned—he has shown that he is weak where, perhaps, I am strong. You see, I am opening my heart to you very freely, Laurence," she interposed, with a wan smile, "so if he should come back repentant I think I might be able to help him up toward true manhood again. It was for

‘good or ill,’ you know, and then, too, he is Alice’s father. Oh, yes, my friend, I see my duty very plainly, and I believe that I should have strength given me to do it,” she concluded, earnestly, tears springing to her lovely eyes.

“Constance, I believe that you are the noblest, the grandest woman the earth holds!” the young man exclaimed, while he regarded her with reverent eyes.

“Oh, no,” she replied, with a sigh. “I am afraid I am very weak in some respects; but if one has convictions one has no right to violate them. And so, Laurie,” with an appealing glance, “you shall be my dear friend, my brother still, if you let me confide in you as such during Reginald’s protracted absence, and you will never——”

“No, Constance, I will never wound you again as I have wounded you to-day. I will never again refer to the past or the strong desires which have so nearly mastered me while Noel Southworth lives.”

He could not refrain from adding that last clause, for he knew that if he should ever hear of the man’s death he should put forth every effort in his power to win this pure and noble woman for his wife.

“Thank you, Laurence,” Constance returned in a low tone; but her eyes drooped suddenly, for she could not fail to comprehend the significance of those last words.

By tacit consent they immediately changed the subject, and Constance, feeling a sense of freedom and relief, such as she had not experienced since her husband’s flight, feeling deeply grateful for the counsel

and support of such a friend, threw off all care for the time and gave herself up to the enjoyment of her drive.

Laurence, also, although he never for a moment could forget the sorrow of losing her, seemed more like himself as Constance smiled, chatted and even laughed outright now and then with something of her girlish exuberance.

He felt that it would be happiness unspeakable to be allowed to remain near her, to guard her, in so far as he might, from the cares and ills of life, to have her appeal to him when difficulties arose and to seek his counsel upon all questions that might perplex her.

The day was a charming one, the country just in its prime, and something of peace and content shone upon the fair young wife's face when at last they drew up before Professor Gardiner's office, showing that she had enjoyed her little outing and was the better for it.

Constance had been obliged to return to the office to get some letters which she was to answer that evening, and she ran lightly upstairs, while Laurence waited at the door, for he was going to drive her to her boarding house.

There was no one in the outer room, and she passed on to the private office, softly opening the door, when she saw a sight which both startled and shocked her, and made her cry out in dismay.

Professor Gardiner was sitting before his desk, his head bowed upon one hand, while in the other he held a letter tightly clutched. His face was white and convulsed with pain, his eyes were heavy with unshed

tears, his whole attitude bespeaking deep trouble of some kind.

"I beg your pardon," Constance faltered, "I should have knocked."

"Never mind; come in," said her friend, controlling himself with an effort. "You are surprised to find me in such a plight as this, but the old have their sorrows to bear as well as the young, and even so simple a thing as a letter," glancing at the sheet in his hand, "will sometimes throw the strongest man off his balance. But never mind—never mind. Forget what you have seen, my little friend, and by to-morrow 'Richard will be himself again.' "

He carefully folded the letter, returned it to its envelope, and locked it away in a drawer; but Constance could see that his hands trembled like leaves in the wind, and she wondered what tidings could have moved him so.

She secured the letters which she wanted, then, bidding him good-night, she went softly out, but feeling almost as if she had been walking upon a new-made grave.

CHAPTER V.

MARGUERITE IS CONFRONTED BY A BITTER REVELATION.

While Constance was bravely battling with her sorrow and the unaccustomed drudgery of life, trouble of another kind had assailed her brother on the other side of the ocean.

After Reginald and his wife were nicely established in their own home it seemed to the former that life bade fair to prove very happy to them.

Marguerite, while she still manifested a certain amount of reserve, and never encouraged or offered any expression of affection, seemed to be content and in better spirits than she had ever manifested.

She made their home wonderfully pleasant and appeared to enjoy the care of it exceedingly. She insisted on keeping only one servant and continued to help about the house herself.

"We have so few rooms, Reginald," she said, one day, in reply to some objections of his to what she was doing, "that we have no accommodations for another girl. Norah is very capable and is able to do all the hard work, while I really like to have a little care and exercise myself. It seems more as if the home really belongs to me to have some responsibility."

"Then you are not doing all this merely because I have refused to use your income for our support?"

Reginald inquired, while he searched his wife's beautiful face with earnest scrutiny.

She flushed up rosily at the question.

"Well, I am not going to deceive you," she smilingly returned after a moment of hesitation. "It is not altogether that, though I am bound to confess it has influenced me somewhat. You must not be offended with me; but since I am the wife of a poor physician, who absolutely refuses to carry out certain cherished plans of his own, simply because my income would be used to defray needful expenses, I cannot, with any degree of comfort, accept luxuries which, with his present limited income, he can ill afford to supply. I wish," she continued, appealingly, "that you would not try to practice—I wish you would devote your time to study, as you planned to do before coming abroad, for I know you are working too hard; you are beginning to look thin and worn already. My income is more than sufficient for all our needs; and, truly, I should be happier if you would assume the control of it and use it freely as if it had always been yours."

"I cannot do that, Marguerite," Reginald responded, with a decision there was no mistaking. "I must build and stand upon my own foundation, or I should feel humiliated."

"Then I shall live upon the same plane with my husband," Marguerite proudly returned, but with a slight quiver of pain in her tones. "If he must work, then I will work also."

And she resolutely adhered to her determination.

Every morning she arose early and was neatly and becomingly dressed to serve Reginald at breakfast.

And this kind of life appeared to agree with her, for she grew plump and rosy; her eye was bright, her step elastic, and Reginald was greatly encouraged as he began to hope that a future of robust health lay before her.

She had shown no signs of her mental trouble for some time, although she was still under the care of the noted brain specialist, and never referred in any way to the sorrows of the past.

She was a dear lover of art and became enthusiastic over the treasures which Paris contained. She spent much time in the various galleries and museums, and even put herself under the instruction of one of the best masters in the city.

She also purchased a fine piano and devoted a portion of every day to earnest practice, and although she was not an artist in this line, Reginald was often cheered and entertained by her sweet songs, as well as by her instrumental achievements, when he returned from the hospital after a hard day's work.

Her manner had begun to change somewhat toward him. Little by little her excessive reserve melted away; she became more social and confiding and appeared so happy that he was often thrilled with the hope of eventually winning her love.

It galled him sometimes when she refused luxuries to which he knew she had been accustomed, when he saw her planning and working to keep their expenses within a certain limit. Still, it showed how thoroughly

in sympathy she was with him—how she appreciated the difficulties under which he was laboring, and he could not fail to experience an increasing affection and admiration for her.

His prospects began to brighten somewhat after a time. Success attended him in his practice, for he was really a skillful physician, possessing rare judgment for one of his years and experience, and he was frequently called upon for consultation in complicated cases.

His mornings were all spent in the hospital, while he devoted the later portion of the day to private patients and his evenings to study.

He returned late one afternoon from a visit to a patient, looking unusually worn and weary. He had assisted in a difficult operation that morning in the hospital, attended to office patients for most of the afternoon, and about an hour before dinner was called out to a very critical case.

It was raining and the evening was chilly, but Marguerite had a cheerful fire burning in the grate, his dressing gown lying on his chair, his slippers warming on the rug.

The room was very inviting and homelike, and Reginald's face lighted with pleasure the moment he opened the door.

Marguerite sat at the table reading by a softly-shaded lamp and looking very lovely in a tasteful dress of old rose cashmere, with a mass of filmy lace fulled into the V-shaped corsage.

She glanced up with a smile of welcome—she had learned to smile often of late—while

the delicate tinge of color deepened on her cheek.

She instantly noticed the weary look on her husband's face, and an anxious expression overspread her own.

"Reginald, you are tired out!" she said, putting down her book and rising to meet him. "And your coat is wet," she added. "I am afraid you have taken cold. Let me have both coat and hat, and I will take care of them."

"No, indeed, Marguerite—I am able to wait upon myself," he responded, but with a thrill of grateful feeling in his tones for her thoughtfulness.

She playfully insisted upon having her own way, however, and bore away the things in triumph.

Presently she came back and helped him on with his dressing gown, then, bringing him the evening paper, she told him to rest for a few moments, after which they would have dinner.

She remained standing by his side, watching his pale face with some anxiety while he leaned back in his chair and stretched out his feet toward the glowing gate, with a sense of comfort and enjoyment stealing over him.

"Reginald, I wish you wouldn't——" Marguerite began as she laid one hand upon the back of his chair and unconsciously began to smooth his hair, which had become slightly disarranged.

A quiver of joy ran through every fibre of his being at her unaccustomed touch and the note of anxiety in her tone.

"Wouldn't what?" he questioned.

"Work so hard."

"I like it."

"But you are wearing yourself out."

"It is in a good cause," he answered, lightly.

"Please don't!" she cried out, almost sharply. "If you should be ill—if you should die, what could I do?"

The man's heart bounded within him. He put up his hand, captured the one resting upon his head and clasped it closely.

"Marguerite," he said, turning to look up into her face, his eyes searching hers with passionate earnestness—"Marguerite, have I become necessary to you? Tell me, dear! Oh, give my hungry heart one crumb of comfort!"

"You are—all that I have in the world, Reginald," she responded in a low tone, with downcast eyes, while her fingers involuntarily closed more tightly over his.

He could not speak for a moment because of the tumult within his heart, for he really believed that the day star of love was at last rising for him.

His emotion was so intense that every atom of color vanished from his face, and he looked almost ghastly in the lurid glow of the fire.

"Then you would miss me, Marguerite, if—if anything should happen to part us?" he said when he could speak.

"Miss you! Oh Reginald—are you ill?—You look so frightfully pale!" she cried in alarm as she bent down to look more closely into his face.

How supremely beautiful she seemed to him with that anxious look softening all her features, and Re-

ginald held his breath as he watched her and he was obliged to put a strong curb upon himself to keep from reaching out his arms and snatching her to him in a swift, passionate embrace.

But he feared to startle her from this unusual mood—he feared to see the old dreaded reserve come back again.

“No, Marguerite, I am not ill,” he forced himself to say, with what calmness he could. “I am only tired after a rather hard day’s work, and I am happier at this moment than I have ever been before, because you tell me that I am necessary to you—that I am all you have; because you look more kindly on me—you speak more affectionately to me than you have ever done. Oh, Marguerite!” he continued, a mighty yearning in his voice, “if I might dare to hope that you are learning to love me ever so little! My darling, I have never kissed your face or your lips, and a ‘brother’ may surely kiss his sister. Will you not grant me one little caress to give me hope?”

He drew her gently toward him by the hand which he retained all this time, while she, with a strangely luminous light growing in her great brown eyes, seemed to be yielding to the influence of his love.

Nearer and nearer the stately, graceful figure drooped, the lovely color deepening in her cheeks, her red lips trembling with some inward emotion, while he could see the soft folds of lace on her bosom rise and fall from the rapid beating of her heart.

For the moment he was almost intoxicated with the thought that at last he had won her.

"My wife—my love!" he murmured, tremulously, as he reached forth his arms to infold her, when at that very instant his office bell rang a jangling peal, and with a violent start Marguerite drew back, and his opportunity was gone, for the color suddenly fled from his wife's lovely face, while something of her old reserve returned, rendering her cold, stately and unapproachable again.

Reginald sighed heavily with disappointment as he arose from his chair to answer the bell.

But he lingered one moment.

"Marguerite," he began, wistfully, his pained eyes studying her averted face.

"It is a cold, stormy night, Reginald—pray do not keep your patient waiting," she interposed in a constrained tone as she moved aside for him to pass.

If he could have but known that it was the constraint of maidenly timidity, combined with the shock which the noisy peal of the bell had given her, he might have followed up his advantage and won a confession from her lips even then.

But her sudden reserve wounded him, and with a weary step he went out to answer his bell, but, alas for him! leaving the parlor door open behind him.

As he opened the hall door and saw who was standing without he uttered an exclamation of astonishment, for it was no other than his old friend and college chum, Eliot Sprague!

"Aha! Alexander, I have unearthed you at last!" the young man cried in a hearty, genial tone that rang through the hall like a clarion note. "How are you,

old boy?" he rattled on. "I saw you on the boulevard yesterday and tried to attract your attention, but you were so absorbed in thoughts profound you did not see me and disappeared before I could get to you. What's the matter, though? You look as if you had seen a ghost, Alexander!" the stranger concluded as he noticed his white, distressed face.

"For Heaven's sake, Eliot, hush!" Reginald cried in a hoarse whisper. Then seizing his friend by the hand he added, "Come in here, and leading him within his office, shut the door.

As Reginald left the parlor to answer the bell, Marguerite turned to look after him, clasping her white hands over her rapidly-beating heart, while her face softened, her lips parted in a tender smile, and tears sprung into her luminous eyes.

Could Reginald have seen her then he would have known that his battle was more than half won, that his patient waiting was on the verge of being rewarded; but——

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a gley,
And leave us naught but grief and pain
For promised joy."

Marguerite stood thus, listening to ascertain who had come for Reginald and dreading to have him called out again in the cold and wet, when she was suddenly electrified by hearing the glad, exultant voice of a stranger address her husband with a familiarity which precluded the possibility of a mistake by the name of Alexander!

She gave one violent start—she threw out one white hand with a gesture of mingled amazement and repulsion; then stood like a statue, listening to every word that followed, and of course heard the repetition of that name—Alexander.

What could it mean?

All her color faded, her lips were compressed in a stern, straight line, and a look of doubt and perplexity shadowed her lovely eyes.

“Alexander!” she repeated in a husky whisper, a shiver running over her from head to foot.

Yet the gentleman who had called evidently knew her husband intimately. No stranger would ever address another so familiarly, while in confirmation of the fact came those startled words of her husband’s, “For Heaven’s sake, Eliot, hush!” every one of which her quickened sense of hearing caught, in spite of his efforts to suppress his tones.

“What can it mean?” Marguerite murmured after the two men had entered the office and shut the door. “Can it be some miserable mistake?”

No, for there was every evidence that each had recognized the other; while it was only too apparent that Reginald had hurried his visitor within his office to prevent further revelations in her hearing.

Like one walking in her sleep, Marguerite went back to her chair and sat down.

She was as pale as snow. Her hands, cold as ice, fell listlessly upon her lap, while all the lines of her beautiful face grew hard and stern.

For fully five minutes she sat thus, never moving,

looking straight before her and scarcely seeming to breathe.

Then, almost mechanically, she began to gather up some papers which Reginald had carelessly thrown upon the table when he came in, arranging them in an orderly manner.

Among them was the London *Lancet*, a medical journal, and as she lifted this a letter slipped from between the leaves and fell upon the floor at her feet.

It had no envelope, and the thin French paper was closely written over in a beautiful clear, ladylike hand.

Marguerite stooped to pick it up and replace it where she had found it, but as she did so four words at the bottom of the sheet caught her eye and seemed to freeze the very blood in her veins, to benumb her limbs, sear her brain and rend her heart in twain.

What a revelation they were to her!

Was it a dream, a horrible nightmare that had seized her and held her enthralled during the last ten minutes?

Had Reginald really come in at all, or was it all a vision? Had she been on the verge of a great happiness? Her husband pleaded like a passionate lover for some sign of affection from her, and had she almost yielded to the spell of his presence and his fond words? Or had it been but a chimera of her brain?

Had a strange man called at their door and addressed her husband by the name of Alexander?

Was this letter, which she seemed to be holding in her hands, with those four words of fire staring up at

her, something tangible, or a mere illusion of her fancy?

She put up her hand as if to brush a film from her eyes and to assure herself that she was awake and in her right mind; but the sharp rattle of that soft, thin paper made her shrink and cringe with sudden pain.

No, it was no dream, no delusion; it was a terrible reality—one that would wreck her life and haunt her as long as she retained consciousness, for staring up at her from that perfumed sheet which rattled in her trembling hands, as if in mocking mirth at her misery, she still saw those fatal words

“Your loving sister—Constance.”

CHAPTER VI.

“YOU HAVE DECEIVED ME.”

Fatal words—those that bespoke the fond remembrance of a loving sister on the other side of the water!

Ah, yes, for they also told her that she had been duped, deceived, treated like a fractious child that must be soothed and artfully enticed into yielding to a will stronger than its own.

She had married Reginald believing him to be Dr. Knox, when, alas! she had, in reality, married the brother of the woman who had won the lover whom she had idolized—the one woman whom of all others she wished to shun.

Reginald Knox? No, Reginald Alexander, the brother of Constance Southworth!

Oh, could she believe it—could it be possible?

She might have read the letter through and assured herself of the fact or otherwise, but this she scorned to do. Enough had already been revealed by those four words to prove her suspicions true.

She sprung from her chair, tossing the letter from her with angry vehemence as if it had been a thing of venomous life to sting her, as indeed it had, to her very soul.

She paced the room with impatient steps, wondering what the two men in the office were talking about, and

feeling as if she could not wait to confront Reginald and demand the truth from him.

Her husband had deceived her—the thought stabbed her to the heart.

Why had he done it?

Perhaps he had simply been professionally interested in her case, which she knew had been a very peculiar form of mania, and wishing to study it closely, to experiment upon her, perhaps, for the benefit of science, had taken this way to do it.

The thought was horrible to her. It drove her wild, and her mind went back over the whole ground of her acquaintance with Reginald, trying to analyze his every word and act and discover his probable motive.

All this was absurd, of course. It was a morbid view of the case, but she was too excited then to realize how unreasoning she was.

She knew that her husband was naturally noble, that it was not like him to do anything underhanded or mean. He seemed to be sincerely fond of her; always most kind, most considerate of her, and tenderly attentive to her every wish and need.

Still, the question recurred again and again; why had he deceived her? Why had he married her under a name that was not his own?

Ah! how near she had come to making a fool of herself, she thought, a hot, angry blush surging up to her brow.

How nearly she had betrayed to him that she was almost, if not quite, upon the point of loving him when

he had pleaded a few moments before so earnestly for some expression of affection!

He had seemed so tender, so true and noble that she had been nearly won over to yielding to him.

But what should she do now?

All her soul arose in arms against the deception that had been practiced upon her and absorbed every other feeling. She was tied to him. She had pledged herself to him for weal or woe until death should part them, and he was the brother of the woman whom she had hated with all the fiercest passion of her heart.

She had not thought much about Constance of late. She had been "out of sight," and so "out of mind," and, wholly occupied with her home duties, her music, painting and sightseeing, she had almost forgotten her existence. She had indeed almost forgotten the existence of the man who had so heartlessly betrayed her affections.

But the startling discovery of this evening, when she had been so peaceful, so content, so almost happy, aroused anew all the old bitterness, and this, added to the anger against her husband, wrought her up to the highest pitch of excitement.

Faster and faster she paced the floor, with flashing eyes and blazing cheeks.

Her pulses throbbed, her brain seemed to be ringing with the beating of a thousand hammers, and her heart seemed like a ton weight in her bosom.

But, hark! Reginald's friend was going now. She heard the office door open and the two men came forth, conversing in low, confidential tones.

In all probability they were talking about her, she jealously thought. Perhaps Reginald had been explaining to his old acquaintance how he had married a girl who was half mad and his motives for so doing.

Now they were exchanging friendly good-nights and planning to meet at some place on the morrow, perhaps with the intention of discussing her case more freely, was the suspicious suggestion of her overwrought mind.

Presently Reginald would come back to her.

Would he try to keep up the old farce of begging again for some expression of her love?

Aha! She would meet him with weapons as keen and cruel as his own, for the discovery of his treachery had been like a dagger in her heart.

There! The door is shut. Her husband turns and comes slowly through the hall. Does he dread to meet her, that his steps drag so? The next moment he stands before her.

One glance into her excited face and one gleam from her blazing eyes tell him that she has heard the greeting of his friend, that she suspects the truth and will not rest until she has forced the whole story from him.

"Marguerite!" he said, gently, as he approached her, a tender, appealing look on his face.

"Traitor!" she cried in a low, concealed tone.

He knew then that she had surmised the worst, that he would have to go back to the beginning and explain everything, and his heart sunk as he thought of the possible consequences to her.

"No, Marguerite, I am no traitor," he returned in a firm, quiet tone. "Of course I cannot fail to understand what you mean—that you overheard the greeting of my old friend Eliot Sprague, and your suspicions regarding my identity are aroused."

"Not my suspicions, but my convictions. The knowledge that you have basely deceived me by marrying me under an assumed name, to suit some underhanded purpose of your own," she retorted, with stern, white lips.

"Underhanded purpose! Oh, my wife, do not so misjudge me!" Reginald cried in a voice full of pain. "What purpose could I possibly have but that of saving you from the malady that was fast destroying you?"

"I cannot tell, unless it was to secure a better opportunity to study and experiment upon my peculiar and interesting case," she bitterly responded.

"Again you cruelly misjudge me," her husband quietly returned, with a face that was almost ghastly from wounded love and honor. "I do not deny that yours was 'a peculiar and interesting case,' and that I have been deeply absorbed in investigating and treating it, but with no unworthy motive, let me assure you. I loved you, Marguerite, with my whole heart and soul. If I had not I could not have——"

He checked himself suddenly, and she knew that he did so because he would not wound her by reminding her that without a deep and absorbing love he never could have bound himself for life to one who was affected with the taint of insanity, from which he had no surety that she would ever entirely recover.

She felt rebuked. She knew that she owed him only deepest gratitude and reverence for what he had done for her, for being so patient and tender with her, for leaving his practice and country for her and toiling now so ceaselessly in order that she might have the benefit of the best advice and treatment in the world.

But in her present excited, bitter state she could not listen to the voice of either conscience or reason.

"As for your accusation that I married you under an assumed name," he continued, "that is also without foundation, for I have been careful to do nothing that would dishonor either you or myself."

"You called yourself Dr. Knox——" Marguerite began, scornfully.

"True. I am Dr. Reginald Knox Alexander——"

"The brother of Constance Alexander?"

"Yes, and I married you under that name. I will give you the certificate of our marriage, and you will find it fully recorded there. I would not wrong you——"

"Why did you do it? Why did you deceive me?" she demanded, passionately.

"Sit down, Marguerite," Reginald commanded in a tone of quiet authority as he rolled a chair toward her, and she sunk into it, partly because she felt impelled to obey him and partly because she was trembling so that she was scarcely able to stand.

Her husband took another facing her and then resumed:

"I will tell you everything, dear, and you shall judge

for yourself whether my motives were pure or otherwise."

She knew without any explanation that they had been pure, but with strange obduracy she could not forgive the deception which had made her the wife of the brother of the woman who had robbed her of the man she had once loved.

"You remember the circumstances of our first meeting," Reginald resumed after a moment of thought. "The moment you stepped upon that street car I was attracted toward you, for I knew that your mental condition was not normal. When you fell and fainted, I, as became one of my profession, sprung to your aid and gave you the benefit of my judgment and skill. When you began to revive, your first words were an expression of violent hatred against one of the sweetest women the world holds—my sister Constance. I knew previous to this from your manner, from the peculiar expression of your eyes, that you had suffered some great mental shock, and now this unaccountable hatred of a pure and lovely woman confirmed me in the belief that you were slightly insane, at least upon that one point. Of course the moment you spoke of my sister in that way I knew that I could never gain your confidence, that I could do you no good, and you would immediately turn from me with a feeling of repulsion if you should learn that I was the brother of the woman toward whom you were so bitter. Consequently I introduced myself by my middle name."

"There were other physicians in New York City

who could have attended me," Marguerite here coldly interposed.

An expression of sharp agony swept over Reginald's face. Surely, he told himself, if she felt thus, if he had gained no greater hold upon her regard than was apparent from this remark, it would perhaps have been better for them both if he had left her to her fate or some "other physician."

His face was almost convulsed as he bent nearer her and asked

"Are you sorry, Marguerite, that I did not call another physician to you, as I proposed? Would you rather I had left you then and never interested myself in your case? Do you regret——"

"But you had no right to deceive me. You should have told me truly who you were," she cried, evading his questions.

"It was done upon the impulse of the moment and with no thought that I should act as your physician in the future. But when you voluntarily put yourself under my care, having given you the name of Reginald Knox, I felt that I could not explain my position without destroying your confidence in me. You know that your strange feelings toward my sister would have impelled you to reject my services, and I firmly believe that in that case you would still have been in New York, steadily growing worse, instead of being the blooming, cheerful woman that you are to-day."

"To-day!" murmured Marguerite, with curling lips.

"Oh, Marguerite, cannot you forgive that harmless stratagem which was prompted **only** by the purest of

motives, that of being of real service to you?" Reginald cried, appealingly.

"You have deceived me!" she perversely repeated.

"Yes, by simply withholding my surname from you," he sadly returned. "Must that be regarded as an unpardonable sin? I did it with no intention of wronging you. I loved you, my darling. I believed I could save you. I vowed that I would save you if it were in the power of human agency to do it. But after I learned your history I did not dare to tell you the truth——"

"My history! What do you know? Has Noel Southworth dared to tell you aught of his perfidy toward me?" Marguerite questioned, a vivid flush staining her face.

"No," Reginald replied. "I learned from Miss Rainford where your home had been previous to your residence in New York, and desirous of ascertaining something regarding your antecedents—whether your trouble was hereditary or not—I made a trip to Rosemond. By chance I learned that Dr. Wright had been your family physician. I went directly to him, told him of your accident, described the state you were in, and asked him if he would tell me something about your previous life and advise me regarding the course of treatment I was contemplating for you. It was through him that I learned of the wrong that Noel Southworth had done you, and thus realized that your mental trouble and hatred of Constance were the result of it. Of course this revelation only confirmed me in the belief that I must keep my identity from you if I were to

continue to treat you. As time passed and I saw that your confidence in me was increasing, as my love for you strengthened and developed accordingly, I planned to come abroad with you and thus remove you from all danger of meeting either Noel Southworth or his wife. I believe that a year or two of freedom from all unpleasant mental excitement, with good care and skilful treatment, would result in a complete cure. I have not been disappointed in my hopes. You have steadily improved in every way, and two hours ago I should have pronounced you a perfectly well woman if any one had asked my opinion."

"Two hours ago—should have—— Why do you speak so? Why do you use that doubtless tense?" Marguerite questioned as she leaned toward her husband, intense eagerness written upon her white face, her eyes glowing like live coals.

"Because," Reginald returned with a sinking heart as he noticed her wild look, "I perceive, from certain indications to-night, that it would take but very little excitement such as you are now indulging in to cause a fatal relapse, to throw you back into the condition you were in when we left New York. It rests wholly with you, Marguerite," he went on, impressively, "whether you are to be a happy, useful woman in the future, or whether you become a hopeless maniac——"

"You think that!" she exclaimed, shrinking and shuddering as from a stinging blow.

"I am sure of it," he gravely answered, "if you continue to cherish this root of bitterness toward the man who has wronged you and who never was worthy of

you—who, I fear, may yet make my sister regret that she ever married him—if you continue to foster such unreasonable hatred of Constance, your life is going to be controlled always by monomania. You have made rapid strides on the road to perfect health since we came abroad, and you have it in your power to keep well and be happy if you will, or you have it in your power to ruin both your life and mine!”

“Yours?” she questioned, with slightly curling lips.

“Yes, mine. Oh, Marguerite, is it of so little value to you?” he cried, appealingly. “If I save you and can but win you, I shall be supremely happy. If I lose you my future must be a blank. Oh, my love,” and he stretched out his arms toward her, a mighty yearning in his voice, “let me save you, let me win you; yield yourself to my love and be happy with me. Do not nurse that old love—it will be but a viper in your bosom. You know that the man was never worthy of you. You are worshiping a false idol, and I believe you will live to see the proof of it.”

Marguerite started from her chair, her beautiful face one sheet of flame.

“Do you imagine for a moment that I still love that traitor? Have you forgotten what I told you the day you asked me to be your wife?” she demanded in a passionate tone.

“No, I have not forgotten,” Reginald said, sadly, “but it almost seems as if there must be a lingering fondness for him. I can reconcile your long-continued bitterness toward my sister in no other way.”

“You imagine it is caused by a feeling of jealousy?”

Marguerite remarked, with intense scorn. "How can you imagine that I could give one regretful thought—would lower myself by cherishing one spark of affection for such a craven, who, as you have said, is unworthy of the regard of any true woman. No, Reginald Alexander, every vestige of love was crushed out of my heart that morning when I saw him lead your sister to the altar. But the wrench—the shock—almost destroyed both life and reason, and one cannot readily rally from such a blow. But to-day he is no more to me than the stones in yonder pavement. I could meet him now without so much as the quickening of a pulse beat."

"Is that true?" Reginald exclaimed, his heart bounding with sudden joy and renewed hope. For if her love for Noel Southworth were indeed really dead, it was possible perhaps that a new love might in time spring up in its place. Indeed, he believed he had that very evening had evidence that it would be so.

"It is true," she said so positively that he could not doubt it.

"Then there is hope for you, dear," he returned, with a thrill of tenderness in his voice, "and will you not strive to conquer, to root out of your heart this unreasonable aversion to my sister? She is a very sweet and lovable woman, and if you could but know her thoroughly I am sure you could not fail to love her. I had a letter from her this very day," he added, feeling in his pocket for it, "and I want to read you a tender passage regarding yourself."

CHAPTER VII.

AT LAST SHE LOVED HER HUSBAND.

"Here is your letter," said Marguerite, coldly, as she stooped to pick up the epistle, which she had angrily tossed upon the floor, and passed it to him.

He looked astonished.

"Then you have read it?" he said, thinking perhaps that was how she had learned the truth regarding his identity.

"Read it!" she repeated, scornfully. "I never read other people's letters. I took up the London *Lancet* while you were out. The letter slipped from between its pages to the floor, and as I picked it up I simply caught sight of the four closing words—'Your loving sister—Constance'—which, of course, confirmed the suspicions which had been aroused by your friend's greeting."

"Forgive me, Marguerite," Reginald said, regretfully. "I spoke thoughtlessly. I might have known you would not read the letter, and yet I wish you had. There is nothing in it you might not see. Let me read you the passage I spoke of," and he began to unfold it.

But she stopped him with an imperative gesture.

"I do not wish to hear it," she said, icily.

"Are you so obdurate, so implacable?" Reginald ex-

claimed, sorrowfully. "I cannot understand your strange antipathy to my dear sister."

"She is Noel Southworth's wife," was the almost sullen response.

Reginald sighed heavily.

"Yes, she is his wife," he gravely returned, "but she did not consciously wrong you by marrying him. She did not know of your existence at the time. She is a very faithful little wife, too. They are living in San Francisco now. They have one little child—Alice, they have named her, for my dear mother—and Constance has been very brave during their reverses, for the same failure that ruined me also swamped Noel Southworth's fortune. My sister was very delicately reared, but now she is putting her little shoulder to the wheel most nobly, and, I feel sure, must be a great comfort to her husband."

Marguerite made no reply to this information, but her face flushed redly at Reginald's reference to Constance's faithfulness as a wife.

There was an awkward pause of several minutes, during which Marguerite sat with downcast eyes, her hands lying listlessly on her lap.

"Are you still offended with me, dear?" Reginald at last inquired. "Can you not overlook my one offense against you? I had begun to hope that life was not going to be a failure for us—that we were destined to enjoy something of real domestic happiness in the future. If I have sinned against you it was with no intention of wronging you. My motives were pure, my only thought your ultimate welfare."

"Deception of every form is exceedingly repugnant to me," Marguerite briefly replied.

"And to me also," Reginald said, flushing, "and perhaps I have been guilty of a great mistake. Maybe it was wrong for me to ask you to become my wife without explaining my position to you, and yet I cannot help feeling that the end has justified the means. However," he continued, with a sigh that was almost a groan, "if it has utterly alienated your regard and respect for me I will do what I can to atone for it. Feeling thus, you will of course be unhappy to remain with me, and if you desire, I will arrange for you a comfortable and pleasant home apart from me, or I will go away from here, leaving you with Norah, but look in upon you frequently, just to assure myself that you are well. Perhaps, however, you would prefer that I should arrange for you to return to America. I know some nice people who are going to sail in a couple of weeks. I will do whatever you wish, Marguerite. My chief desire is that you may be well and happy."

Marguerite darted a look of wild astonishment at him as he made these propositions to her.

Go away from Reginald or let him leave her! She had never thought of such a thing.

Go back to America without him! Put the broad ocean between them, so that she could never see his kind, noble face or hear his genial, cheerful voice!

Could she bear to live without his tender care for her—his hearty interest in her painting, her music and all that she enjoyed, not to mention the thousand little

attentions which he lavished so freely upon her every day of his life?

Then how could she bear to leave him alone in that great city, with no one to look after his comfort when he returned from a hard day in the hospital and among his patients—with no one to keep his home in order or prepare the home-like meals which he enjoyed so much?

How weary and worn he had looked to-night when he came in out of the rain and cold; but how he had brightened as he entered the warm parlor to find his dressing gown and slippers laid out for him and some one to speak a cheerful word and give him a friendly smile!

How could he get along without it all? Did he realize what he was saying when he told her that he would arrange for her to go away from him?

Her heart sunk with a strange feeling of despair at the thought of it, and she grew faint and white with dread.

It was true that she had felt angry and humiliated to learn that he had married her under a name different from that by which he was known to the world; to discover she was the wife of Constance Alexander's brother and so closely allied by this tie to the man who had so cruelly deserted her, so that for a time she had been aroused to almost a white heat of passion and resentment.

But there was no one in the world whom she honored and respected as much as she did Reginald or who was so congenial to her, and she had been very

content with him. She had come to regard herself as belonging to him in name if not really in heart—to feel that she would pass her life with him in a peaceful way, and would always be surrounded by his tender thought and care. She had no one else to lean upon! To whom could she go—upon whom depend if she went away from him? How she would miss him if deprived of his support—miss his genial companionship, his practical, intelligent counsels—his sympathy, yes, and the deep and abiding affection which betrayed itself in his every word and deed. Did he wish it—this separation?

The thought caused a sharp stab of agony in her heart, and for a moment her senses seemed slipping from her.

He had said that his chief desire was for her well being and happiness; but perhaps he had grown weary and hopeless in the long struggle to win her love, and had finally come to feel that it would be better for them to part than to try to live on in such an unnatural way.

Why could she not love him? Did she not love him? The question made her heart leap, and then it sunk again. Ah! she dared not tell him that—she dared not raise hopes which she might never be able to fulfil, for surely she had never felt toward him as she had once felt toward Noel Southworth, and yet the thought of going away from him made her strangely sad.

“I—I cannot leave you, Reginald,” she faltered, “unless——”

"Unless what?" he asked, with a quick, indrawn breath.

"Unless it is your wish."

"God forbid!" he cried, sharply. "I should be desolate indeed without you. I am almost as desolate with you," he went on, with a note of despair in his voice, "to live in your presence day after day and not be able to win your love. And yet I could better bear to have you go than that you should remain and be unhappy—to cherish such anger and resentment against me as you have shown to-night."

"But—I am your wife, Reginald."

"You are—my housekeeper," he retorted, with sudden bitterness; then, as he saw her flush hotly and her lips tremble, he added, contritely: "Pardon me, Marguerite. I should not have spoken thus; but my heart is very sore, even though I know that I have no right to expect anything more than you have given me, for I told you when I asked you to become my wife that you should be as free as you were then, if you would but give me the right to protect you and devote myself to the restoration of your health."

He thought a moment, then continued, more calmly:

"If you will be happier to remain with me, then we will drop the subject just here; but if there is the slightest desire on your part to be free, I pray that you will not keep the truth from me, and I will do the best that I can for you."

"I have nowhere to go, Reginald. I am utterly alone in the world but for you," Marguerite replied in an unsteady voice, while but for the strong pride

within her she would have burst into passionate weeping, the very thought of being "free" from him filling her with a sense of despair for which she could not account even to herself.

"Very well; then we will go on as we are," Reginald returned, with a touch of bitterness, for it cut him keenly that she should wish to remain under his protection and yet refuse to pardon him for the deception which he had practiced upon her.

"There is one change that I would like to make," he continued after considering a moment. "Since you have learned the truth regarding my identity, I would like to resume my true name if you do not object."

Marguerite colored, and something of her old resentment arose.

"Certainly," she answered, with quiet dignity. "I should prefer to have you do so. But will it not require some awkward explanations at the hospital?"

"No. I am already known there as Dr. Alexander. I could not feel justified in withholding my true name from the physicians there, and so registered my full name when entering upon my duties in that institution. Now are you sufficiently recovered from your excitement, Marguerite, to have your dinner?" Reginald concluded in a matter-of-fact tone, and indicating by the question that he was inclined to drop the subject.

Marguerite would have been glad to flee to her own room and give relief to her overcharged heart in unrestrained weeping, but she would not leave Reginald to eat his dinner alone, for she knew from his white,

pained face that he also was suffering most keenly.

Somehow she felt guilty of having done him some irreparable injury and desired to atone for it, yet knew not how save by the faithful performance of her usual duties.

"Yes," she replied, rising and forcing back a sob which nearly escaped her. "I will tell Norah to serve dinner immediately, for you surely must be hungry and faint by this time."

The meal was soon on the table, and the unhappy couple sat down to it, but with very little appetite on the part of either.

Marguerite made a pretense of eating, while she forced herself to question Reginald, as was her custom, regarding his experiences of the day; but he, watching her closely, saw what an effort she was making, that she scarcely tasted the food before her, while her hand trembled visibly as she passed the cup of coffee which she had prepared with her usual care.

It was a wretched meal altogether, for it was with difficulty that he managed to eat sufficient to allay his faintness, and it was a relief to both when they at last arose from the table.

"I have a report to make out to-night," Reginald remarked as he was about to leave the room, "and as I shall be obliged to remain up late, I will say good-night to you now."

Marguerite turned a glance of appeal upon him, for he had never spoken so coldly to her before, and his constrained words wounded her deeply.

"Good-night," she returned in a low tone; then

passing swiftly from the room by another door she sped up to her own chamber, where, locking the door, she threw herself upon her bed in a paroxysm of weeping.

One would scarcely recognize beautiful, stately Marguerite Alexander in such utter abandonment as this. Never since the discovery of Noel Southworth's treachery had she wept as she was weeping now; and, strange as it may seem, these floods of tears were like a healing stream in some respects, for they washed away much of the former pain and bitterness and sense of anger and injury that had hitherto filled her heart.

"How he must despise me for being so unappreciative and ungrateful," she murmured when, exhausted with the violence of her emotion, she could weep no more. "But he does not dream what I have suffered. He cannot know how I once loved Noel Southworth, and how my heart was rent, broken, crushed, when he proved false to me. And yet—how strange it is!—I loathe him now. Reginald is a very king compared with him, and he loves me! Ah——"

She sat up with a start, and a look of mingled surprise and perplexity overspread her face.

It had suddenly occurred to her that Reginald did know something of what she had suffered—that he was even now suffering in the same way because of his unrequited love for her.

And how patiently he had borne it!

For more than a year they had been husband and wife, and during all that time he had never spared

himself where her comfort or her pleasure was at stake. He had carefully guarded her health, he had interested himself in all her pursuits, planning pleasant surprises for her, procuring for her all the new American publications in which she expressed an interest, and in fact leaving nothing undone that could in the least add to her comfort and happiness.

He had been bound up in her—his deep, strong love for her had been patent in his every word and act.

And how had she requited it?

True, she had tried to make his home pleasant; she had seen that his table was abundantly and daintily spread; she had kept his linen spotless and whole; she had tried to make herself a genial companion for him to a certain extent. She had indeed and in truth been his "housekeeper," and that only, for any other conscientious woman could have served him as faithfully in these respects.

Aside from this, she had been absorbed in her own interests—in her music, her painting, her reading and sightseeing, while her noble husband, who had left his profession and his country for her sake, toiled on at the hospital and in his practice outside; his one thought and aim her health and happiness, without one crumb of affection upon which to feed his starving heart.

How faithfully he had kept his compact with her, too! He had promised never to force his affection upon her, never to annoy her by making her feel any sense of obligation to him simply because she bore his name, and though he had not always been able to conceal his love, he had never violated his word to her

until to-night, when he had fairly startled her with its depth and power.

And now he was even ready to give her up entirely—to have her leave him if it would make her any happier, though his sharp “God forbid” when she had asked him if it was his wish had told her how utterly blank his life would be without her. Could anything have proved how great his love was for her more than this?

But she had been strangely shocked and startled by his proposition.

“Leave him! go away from him forever!” she murmured, looking about her pretty room, which was just over his office, when even now she could hear him pacing back and forth instead of writing, as he had told her he was going to do. “Oh, I could not do that!” she added, a feeling of desolation stealing over her as she pictured herself going back to America without him.

Why?

The question seemed to have been shouted in her ears by some unseen presence, demanding a reason for this strange clinging to her husband if she had no love for him.

A startled look crept into her eyes, a wondering expression over her face, while that steady tread below made her heart throb with quickened pulsations.

Then, all at once, a vivid blush leaped into her cheeks, up over her temples to her brow, and lost itself in the lustrous waves of hair upon her white forehead.

Her heart, answering to the wave of consciousness,

bounded with new life within her, a light born of a new hope gleamed in her great brown eyes, a shy, tremulous smile just parted her red lips, and she knew now why she had gradually been growing so content during the last few months, why she had been so happy in the performance of her home duties and in catering to all Reginald's tastes and wishes, why she felt so much pride and interest in his cares, why the smiles had come again to her lips and the songs to her voice.

Yes, like an electric shock the knowledge had come to her, animating and thrilling her whole being with supreme joy—at last she loved her husband!

It had been such a gradual change that she had not realized it before. All unconsciously she had yielded to the influence of his silent but powerful love, until now, in this blessed moment of revelation, she knew that to live without him would be a heavier grief than she had ever yet suffered.

She had loved Noel Southworth wildly, passionately, with the impulsive love of an undisciplined nature.

She loved Reginald Alexander to-day with a holy affection born of reverence and a thorough knowledge of the needs of her strong womanly nature—needs which she now realized that the lover of her youth could never have met.

Her heart at last lay like an open book before her, and she read this sweet new story over and over, confessing it to herself with an ever-increasing joy until, overcome again by the weight of her happiness, she covered her face with her hands and wept again—blessed tears that washed away every trace of bitter-

ness from her soul—all her unreasoning hatred for Constance Alexander, toward whom her heart now opened, for Reginald's sake, with kindness, if not tenderness.

They were tears that did her good, purifying her whole nature and obliterating forever the taint which for so long had threatened her life and her reason, and she knew that she was saved.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WIFE'S OVERTURES MISUNDERSTOOD.

She dropped asleep after that and slept like a little child for several hours.

When she awoke, the clock on the great cathedral near by was striking the hour of midnight; but to Marguerite the sounds seemed like musical chimes ushering in the dawn of a new and joyful life for her.

She arose and, sweeping aside the curtain, looked out of the window.

The night was beautiful. It had cleared while she slept; every cloud had disappeared. The moon was shining brightly in midheaven, flooding everything earthly with a soft radiance; and with a strange sense of exaltation Marguerite told herself that it was symbolic of the blessed future in store for her.

She wondered if Reginald had retired.

She no longer heard those steady pacings below, and the house was still throughout.

Still the sad face of her husband as he had left her to go to his office haunted her and drove all sleep from her eyes.

She stole softly out into the hall and half way downstairs, where, looking over the baluster, she saw that the door of Reginald's office was ajar, for a ray of light was streaming out into the lower hall.

"He will work himself to death," she whispered as she glided quietly on.

Reaching the door, she noiselessly pushed it open, and her heart sunk at the sight which met her gaze.

Her husband was sitting at his desk in an attitude which betrayed both weariness and hopelessness. His arms were thrown out upon the manuscript before him and his head bowed upon them.

Marguerite knew that instead of making out his report, as he had said he was going to do, he had been grieving over their unhappy interview and the relentless attitude she had assumed toward him.

With a rapidly beating heart, a flush on her cheeks and a look of high resolve in her eyes, she stole across the floor and gently laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Reginald," she said, softly, "why will you work so late? You will make yourself ill."

He lifted his head and turned his face toward her, and it was so worn and haggard that she with difficulty suppressed a cry of fear.

She was ready to confess her newly awakened love for him, to plead for forgiveness for the pain she had made him suffer so long, but he shrunk away from her touch as if it had burned him.

"Why are you here at this hour, Marguerite?" he demanded, coldly. "I am well enough. I have my work to do and I cannot leave it; but you—you should be in bed and asleep. Go back at once. Why! have you not been in bed at all?" he exclaimed, as he noticed she was dressed the same as she had been at dinner.

"No," Marguerite replied, but deeply hurt by his manner. "I lay down after going upstairs and fell asleep without realizing it. When I awoke something seemed to impress me that you were still up, and I came to beg that you will go to rest. Will you not, Reginald?"

She leaned toward him, hoping that he would speak but one fond, kind word to her, and thus give her an opportunity to open her heart to him.

"Yes, presently," he responded, but without looking at her; then taking up his pen, as a hint that he wished to be alone, he began to write.

Marguerite turned slowly away, her face pale, her heart sorely wounded.

She could not tell him while he was in this mood of the revelation which had so recently come to her.

"Good-night," she said, choking back a sob as she reached and lingered for an instant at the door.

"Good-night," Reginald replied, but without looking up from his work.

She went wearily out, retraced her steps over the stairs to her room and mechanically began to prepare for bed.

Had she tried Reginald's patience too far? she wondered. Had she killed his love for her by her coldness and indifference, and thus ruined both their lives?

It seemed very, very hard, just as she had had her eyes opened to the state of her own feelings. But perhaps he might relent and appear differently when he was rested; and comforting herself with this reflection, she retired and finally fell asleep.

Reginald, however, aroused by her visit from the almost lethargic despair into which he had fallen, set himself diligently at work to make out the report which he had so long neglected.

He wrote industriously for an hour, and then, utterly worn out, he also retired.

When morning broke both husband and wife came to the breakfast table with pale faces and heavy eyes, while there was an unusual constraint in their manner, although each made an effort to conceal the fact and appear natural.

When Reginald arose from the table he remarked: "Marguerite, do not wait lunch for me to-day. I do not think I can get away to come home for it. I will take it at one of the *cafes* near the hospital."

Marguerite shot a quick glance of inquiry at him.

It was the first time since they had had a home that he had missed coming to lunch with her, and something told her that he would not have failed to come to-day but for the barrier that had arisen between them.

"I wish you would come if you can," she remarked, regretfully. "It will be lonely without you."

Reginald smiled somewhat bitterly.

"Really, I——" he began, with a sarcastic intonation; then, suddenly checking himself, he said in a more natural tone: "I do not think it will be possible."

He bowed formally, bade her good-morning and hurried from the room.

Tears sprung to Marguerite's eyes. He had never left her so coldly before, and she was keenly stung.

It was with difficulty that she restrained a burst of passionate weeping, but she conquered it and resolved that she would not be disheartened by this first repulse.

"I will not be a baby," she murmured. "I have no one to blame for the present state of affairs but myself. Reginald is nearly worn out, both mentally and physically, and I must not censure him too severely. I will strive to do my duty. I will be patient and try to make him understand the change in my feelings, and I will not injure my own health by brooding over his strange treatment of me."

With these wise reflections she resolutely set herself at work, and while she could not forget Reginald's unusual coldness nor the pain it caused her, the day did not seem nearly as long to her as she had anticipated.

She finished a painting upon which she had secretly been at work for several weeks, and as the frame had already been sent home, set it up on an easel in a conspicuous place in their pretty parlor as a surprise for her husband when he should come home to dinner.

He had been very proud of her work, for her teacher claimed that she possessed superior talent in that line, and as she had taken unusual pains with her present subject, she hoped to win words of high commendation from him.

Then she planned with Norah a most tempting dinner, trying to think of viands which Reginald especially liked. She even assisted in arranging the table, cutting some lovely chrysanthemums for a centre

piece, to make it look as dainty and inviting as possible.

She grew more hopeful and light hearted while thus engaged, and as the hour for Reginald's return drew near, her cheeks grew delicately flushed and her eyes animated with anticipation.

But, alas! a bitter disappointment awaited her, for just as she was putting the finishing touches to her work the door bell rang, and presently Norah came to her, bringing a note.

With a sinking heart, she tore it open and read:

"MARGUERITE: Do not wait dinner for me, as a special meeting of the board will detain me until late.

"R. K. ALEXANDER."

The paper dropped from the young wife's nerveless fingers, and all the hope and color faded out of her face.

She was bitterly disappointed that her patient waiting, all her work and planning, had been for naught.

But more than this, she was deeply pained by the coldness and brevity of her husband's note.

He had addressed her simply as "Marguerite." Never before had she been anything less than "Dear Marguerite."

Then he had not expressed one word of regret that he could not come—he had barely stated the fact, as if his absence was a matter of no consequence, save as it might annoy her to keep the table waiting for him. But what had hurt her most was the way he had signed his name.

Heretofore he had always familiarly written it "Yours—Reginald."

Now he had thrown his full name at her—"R. K. Alexander"—with an independent assertion of himself which seemed to betray a feeling of triumph over her in his recovered identity.

Lifting the note from the floor, she read it over, then crushing it in her hands, her heart throbbing with mingled anger and wounded feeling, she touched the bell for Norah.

"Norah," she said when the girl appeared, "the doctor will not be at home to dinner."

"Not coming home to dinner, ma'am, after all the pains we've taken for him!" Norah exclaimed, and almost as much disappointed as her mistress, while she regarded Marguerite's pale face with curious interest.

"No. There is to be a special meeting of the physicians at the hospital, and he cannot come; so you may clear everything away."

"And sure you will have your dinner first, marm?" the girl returned.

"No," said Marguerite, striving hard to conceal her misery. "I am so disappointed I cannot eat. Just bring me a cup of coffee—it will be all that I shall care for."

"But, marm, you will be ill if you do not have something. You had no appetite for your lunch," said the faithful girl, who was deeply attached to her young mistress, and who began to suspect that there was some trouble underneath the simple explanation regarding the doctor's absence.

"I shall do very well if you just bring me the coffee," Marguerite responded, indifferently. "And, Norah——" she added, with a flush, as the girl was turning away.

"Yes'm."

"The doctor is to be known as Dr. Alexander after this."

"Dr. Alexander, marm!" Norah exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes. For certain reasons, which I cannot fully explain to you, he desired for a time to be known only as Dr. Knox, which is his middle name; but now he will resume his last name, and also wishes me to be addressed by it."

"Yes, marm—very well, marm," and Norah disappeared to get the coffee, a wondering expression on her honest face.

"It's mighty strange," she muttered, with a perplexed shake of her head, "and the pretty dear is as much upset over it as I am dumfounded. Dr. Alexander! humph! Then she's to be Mrs. Alexander. Mighty queer doings! But I'd give my right hand for her, so I'll be after asking no questions and take care of her the best I can."

Marguerite drank her coffee, but could not even touch the dainty bit of chicken which Norah ventured to bring her, after which she went upstairs to her own room, feeling too wretched even to read or work.

She went directly to bed, but lay tossing feverishly upon her pillow and listening for her husband's return.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when at last he came, and then he went immediately to his chamber.

Marguerite soon after fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and did not wake again until Norah rang the dressing bell in the morning.

She felt much refreshed, and the sun shining brightly in at the windows both cheered and comforted her.

She dressed with great care, resolving to make herself as attractive as possible in Reginald's eyes and to greet him as if nothing unusual had occurred.

She was indeed very lovely in her tasteful wrapper of pale-pink cashmere, which contrasted beautifully with her clear, creamy complexion, dark hair and eyes.

Reginald glanced up as she entered the dining room with a cheerful good-morning, but his eyes dropped again immediately and a look of pain clouded his face.

Her very loveliness seemed to mock him.

Marguerite caught his look and flushed. She was extremely sensitive, and mistook it for one of scorn for the effort at cheerfulness which she had made.

Still she had resolved to do her utmost to try to bridge over the gulf which seemed opening between them, and without betraying how wounded she was, she began to chat in an off-hand way upon various topics while she poured his coffee. She asked him about the busy day of yesterday, told him she missed him at lunch, and regretted that he had not been able to come to dinner.

"I hope it will not happen often, Reginald," she remarked, appealingly, "for truly it is very lonely to sit down to the table all by myself."

"I regret, Marguerite, if my absence caused you any annoyance——" Reginald began, stiffly.

"Not annoyance," Marguerite interposed, gently. "I hope I shall not allow myself to be unreasonable when you are hard pressed with business. Are there many very sick patients in the hospital just now?"

"A great many."

"It makes it very hard. I am afraid you are over-working," said Marguerite, anxiously.

"Do not be troubled on my account. I shall try to take good care of myself," was the brief response.

"You are not taking good care of yourself," the young wife said as she bent toward him, and speaking with great earnestness. "You are working too many hours; you do not get a proper amount of rest; you have too much care and are losing flesh. Reginald, pray drop your patients and make use of the income that is uselessly accumulating."

"And live upon the money of an unloving wife!" he retorted, more sharply than he had ever spoken to her. "Really, Mrs. Alexander, such a proposition, after our conversation night before last, is an——" he was upon the point of saying "an insult," but he changed to "an exceedingly obnoxious one to me."

The hot blood leaped to Marguerite's brow, making her surpassingly beautiful; her eyes glowed with the fire of a brave resolve, her heart beat like a frightened bird's at the words "unloving wife." The impulse to confess her love for him had seized her, and then, she thought, perhaps he would be willing to share her wealth and not work so beyond his strength.

"Reginald—I——" she timidly began.

"Pray cease," he interrupted, impatiently. "It is useless for you to argue the point, and you will oblige me by never referring to the subject again."

He pushed back his chair from the table and arose as he spoke, evidently with the intention of leaving the room.

Tears sprung to Marguerite's eyes. She was terribly wounded, and the words she intended to speak, and which might have saved them both much sorrow, were thrust back into the depths of her aching heart.

CHAPTER IX.

MARGUERITE AND A PEASANT WOMAN.

"Pardon me," Marguerite said, with quiet dignity, as she also arose, "and pray believe that it was deep anxiety regarding your health which made me suggest it."

Reginald turned to her. Her gentle tone disarmed him and made him ashamed of his brusqueness.

He had never seen her in such a softened mood, while the sight of her tears touched him, and she surely had never seemed more lovely than at that moment.

A sharp pain smote him. It was almost maddening to feel that she was his wife, and yet he had no place in her heart.

"Pardon me," he returned, with his usual courtesy. "I forgot myself; but really I am doing very well, and do not wish you to be troubled about me."

"Will you come home as usual to-day?" Marguerite questioned, with averted eyes.

"Not to lunch," he replied; "probably to dinner, but do not wait if I am late. I think," he added, after a moment of thought, "I will take my lunch hereafter in a *cafe* near the hospital, for it is quite a distance, and some of my outside patients are in that vicinity."

Why had he made this sudden resolve? Heretofore

he had hardly missed a day. He had never mentioned the distance; he had seemed to enjoy coming home to lunch. But surely he looked worn, and Marguerite would not indulge in selfish regrets with that pale, tired face looking into hers.

"Very well," she said, suppressing a sigh. "If it makes it harder for you it may be fully as well for you not to come. Perhaps," she added, with sudden thought, "I might help you on those tedious reports which take so much of your time. I would be glad to relieve you, Reginald, in any way."

He regarded her with surprise for a moment. There was something in her manner this morning that appealed to him in spite of his bitterness.

Then it occurred to him that she regretted her coldness and unreasonable resentment on the evening when she discovered his identity, and she was perhaps taking this way to do penance for it.

He did not want her to punish herself—he simply wanted her love. How blind he was!

"Thank you," he returned, distantly. "I do not believe I shall need to trouble you, although it is very kind of you to offer. But," looking at his watch, "it is nearly nine o'clock and I must be off."

But Marguerite would not allow herself to be discouraged even at this rebuff. She made one more effort to win him back to himself.

"Can you spare me just a minute more?" she smilingly asked. "I want you to see a painting that I finished yesterday."

She led the way into the parlor and pointed at the lovely landscape.

She knew it was fine, for she had taken great pains with it for the sake of winning his praise.

Imagine her disappointment when he remarked, absently, after one sweeping glance at it:

"It is very pretty. I believe, as your teacher says, you have considerable talent. But I must go. Good-morning," and he hurried away, while Marguerite watched him out of sight with a heavier heart than she had known since coming to Paris.

After the departure of Reginald Marguerite became very restless and unhappy. She felt that she must have some change—some diversion, or she would be ill, grieving over the miserable misunderstanding with her husband.

She dressed herself for the street, and having asked Norah to put her up a little lunch—for she felt that she could not come home to eat alone—she started out to spend most of the day in the Louvre.

She never wearied of this magnificent gallery of art. She would often lose herself in the contemplation of the wonderful works of great masters, while she frequently went there to copy, having obtained a pass to do so through the influence of her teacher.

But she was too weary for work to-day, neither did she feel in the mood for it; there was no inspiration in her heavy heart.

She wandered slowly from room to room, from hall to hall, feasting her eyes and her artist soul upon the beauty all about her.

She was standing before an exquisite panel piece in what used to be the ball room of the palace, absorbed in studying the wonderful coloring, the peculiar light and shade, which the skilful artist had thrown upon his picture, when she was suddenly recalled to herself by an exclamation of ecstatic joy, and the next moment some one seized her hand, covering it with kisses, while a figure fell at her feet, exclaiming in French:

"Mon Dieu! Ah! mon Dieu!"—it is Mademoiselle Marguerite—it is Mademoiselle Marguerite come back again!"

Then the creature at her feet fell to sobbing hysterically and to kissing her hand again.

Marguerite was greatly astonished and somewhat excited as well, for she feared that the woman might be insane.

She was a person of perhaps sixty years, petite in figure, with a round face, hair that once must have been jet black, but was now plentifully sprinkled with gray; eyes of coal that retained much of their youthful sparkle, and having the features, manners and dress of a peasant of the better class.

Marguerite thought it exceedingly strange that she should have addressed her by her name, for she knew but very few natives of Paris; while the joy and familiarity which the woman exhibited made her feel sure that she had mistaken her for some other person.

"My good woman, pray get up," she said as she gently tried to lift her to her feet. "I think you have made a mistake—that you have taken me for some one else."

"No! no!" her companion eagerly exclaimed as she arose, but still clinging to Marguerite's hand and searching her face with earnest, loving eyes. "You are Mademoiselle Marguerite! Thank the good God that Jennette has found you at last—that her old eyes are permitted to look once more on this dear face! Ah, petite, where have you been all these long, long years?"

"All these long years?" repeated Marguerite, wondering. "How many years?"

"Eh!" cried the woman, with a start, and rubbing her eyes as if to dispel some illusion of her vision. Then she searched the lovely face before her with renewed eagerness. "Eh! how many?" she continued, a perplexed look stealing over her countenance. "It is just twenty-four years last Michaelmas since I lost Mademoiselle Marguerite. Ah!" with another start, "but you, her very image, are young, and she"—with a puzzled air—"would be more than forty now! *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

"I feared that you had made a mistake," said Marguerite, kindly, for she saw that the woman now realized that she was not the person she thought her to be, and her grief touched her.

"Ah! but Mademoiselle is so like," she murmured, with something of awe in her tone, while her eyes seemed to feast upon Marguerite's loveliness. "The same hair waving so prettily over the white forehead—the same great brown eyes, so true and earnest—the pretty mouth, the sweet smile, the proud carriage. Ah! it is also like—so like," concluded the poor crea-

ture, with a heavy sigh as at last she was convinced that she had indeed made a mistake.

"Will you tell me who this lady was whom I so strongly resemble?" Marguerite graciously inquired, and feeling her curiosity aroused by the fact.

"Mademoiselle Marguerite Delavigne," sadly responded the old woman, "and the good God never gave a fairer, sweeter child to loving parents than my petite nursling whom I loved—ah, mademoiselle, how I loved her!" and the tears gushed afresh from the sorrowing creature's eyes.

"And did she go away and leave you?" Marguerite asked, becoming more and more interested in the fair unknown.

The question only seemed to intensify the woman's grief, and she swayed back and forth, great sobs breaking from her lips.

"Come and sit down," Marguerite said, kindly, as she led her toward a seat and sat down beside her.

But the floodgates having been opened, it was not easy for her companion to regain her self control, and leaving her for a moment, Marguerite went to get her a glass of water.

She appeared rather more composed after drinking it, and Marguerite, thinking to change the current of her thoughts, began to undo the wrapper of a box which she held in her hands.

"Will you share my lunch?" she asked. "I came to have a long day in the gallery, and so brought something to break my fast."

The box was filled with tempting dainties, and her

companion's eyes had a wistful gleam in them as they fell upon them. But she flushed, thanked Marguerite, and politely declined to partake.

"Ah, pray do," Marguerite pleaded. "It will be a favor. I am alone and I also am a trifle homesick to-day, and would like to chat with you while we eat. I am far from my home and in a strange land. I am an American."

"American!" repeated her companion in a tone of surprise; "and have you not any French blood?"

"No," said Marguerite, shaking her head—"at least I think not. Now pray have this sandwich and these little cakes," she added, taking them from the box and laying them with a napkin on the woman's lap. "I think you will find them nice, and I am sure you would not have refused to eat with your Marguerite," she concluded, with an alluring smile.

"Ah, no," was the sad response. "We used often to come to the Louvre, bringing our basket, and you have made it seem almost as if she had come back to me."

"Perhaps, if it will not pain you too much, you would be willing to tell me more about her," Marguerite remarked as she began to peel a luscious orange preparatory to dividing it with her new friend. "I suppose, as her last name indicates, that she was of French birth."

"Ah, yes, mademoiselle. She was the only child of the great artist, Monsieur Delavigne. Their home was in the Chateau Bernous. Has mademoiselle ever visited the chateau?"

"No," Marguerite replied. "I have never even heard of it before."

"Ah! then a great pleasure is in store for her. Such pictures—such bric-a-brac and curios!"

"Is the place open to the public?"

"Not to every one," the woman answered; "only to those who will get passes from Monsieur D'Artelle, the attorney who has the care of it until the heirs can be found. But if mademoiselle will come out to the chateau any afternoon, I—who, with my good Pierre, have charge to keep it in order—will take pleasure in showing her about."

"Thank you," said Marguerite. "I will surely come some day. And so the Chateau Bernous was your Miss Marguerite's home?"

"*Oui*; until—ah me! she ran away from it."

"Ran away!" exclaimed her listener, with a sudden heart bound.

"*Oui*. Shall I tell mademoiselle all her sad story?" asked the woman, who appeared to be longing for sympathy.

"I shall be very glad to hear it if it will not pain you."

"Mademoiselle is kind to feel so much interest," the poor creature returned, with a sigh, and then she proceeded to relate the following story in substance:

The noted artist, Monsieur Delavigne, inherited his great talent, together with a large fortune, from his father. He married young—a beautiful French girl, a belle from the upper circles of Paris, and took her to

his fine estate, the Chateau Bernous, which was located a few miles out of the city. One child was given to them—the lovely Marguerite, who was the idol of her parents' hearts, the joy of their home, the pride of every servant on the estate. She was given every advantage. No expense was spared to perfect her education, and being a very bright child, she readily acquired knowledge and many accomplishments, but to the great disappointment of her parents she did not inherit her father's talents as an artist. As she grew toward womanhood the subject of her marriage was often discussed by her parents, who were anxious to betroth her to the son of one of the nobility of Paris.

But Marguerite did not take kindly to this plan for her future. The young man was not agreeable to her, for he was by no means her equal mentally, while his morals were rather questionable. She refused to receive his attentions, and caused her parents a great deal of uneasiness by her decided preference for an American student whose acquaintance she had made while under instruction in a school for languages, where he taught English for a couple of hours every day.

The disapproval and opposition of her father and mother only served to increase her infatuation for the young man, and when at last there came a crisis and Monsieur Delavigne insisted upon her union with the son of his friend, she suddenly disappeared from her home.

After a few days, however, she wrote to her father

that she had been married to her American lover, whom she devotedly loved and who, she claimed, was destined to become a great man in his own country. She begged his forgiveness and that they both be received into the favor of her parents.

But Monsieur Delavigne was so angered and embittered by this act of his daughter that he renounced her utterly, and though she pleaded again and again for his pardon, he stubbornly withheld it.

In reply to her last letter he sent her a purse of twenty-five thousand francs and a stern message forbidding her ever to return to her home or his presence. He told her that she had made her choice in life and she must abide by it. He, however, did not wholly lose sight of her, although he continued to be as obdurate as ever, and learned that she was living with her husband in a pretty little home in the suburbs of Paris, where they appeared to be very happy. Later he received word from the agent whom he employed to keep an eye on her that her husband had suddenly been called to America by the death of his father, but would soon return to complete his studies. Several months afterward news came that the young wife had been summoned to join her husband, and that was the last they ever heard of her.

Years went by and Madame Delavigne died—"wore herself out grieving for her child," Jennette said, with a heavy sigh. "The house was like a tomb, mademoiselle," the woman continued, tremulously, "and my heart was broken for my nursling. She had been my care from her cradle; she

loved old Jennette and was always kind to her."

Here she broke down, sobbing again; but presently she resumed:

"Two years after madame's death, monsieur the artist also died; but he came to his senses before that, thank the good God, and made a will giving everything to Mademoiselle Marguerite if she could be found within ten years. Monsieur D'Artelle is the attorney, and for seven long years he has been trying to find trace of my poor nursling. The chateau is still cared for as in monsieur's time, for the will requires it. Pierre, my husband, is the head gardener, and I, with one maid, keep the house. But if poor old Jennette could see Mademoiselle Marguerite once more in the home of her father her heart would be full of joy and peace again; but, alas! there remains only three years more, and hope is almost dead."

Marguerite had been deeply interested in the old woman's story and saddened by it also, while for some minutes after it was finished she seemed absorbed in reviewing it.

When she finally lifted her eyes again she found her companion regarding her with a strange, curious look.

"Mademoiselle says she is American?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes."

"Born in America?"

"Yes—I suppose so; I do not know," was the somewhat absent reply.

"Mademoiselle does not know!" repeated the woman, astonished and leaning eagerly toward her.

"No—I am not quite sure. There is rather a sad story connected with my life also," Marguerite replied, some strange impulse prompting her to speak about herself.

"Tell Jennette, please," the woman said earnestly.

"I never knew my own father or mother," the young wife went on. "I was left on the steps of a good man's house when I was a little baby, and so never knew my parentage."

"A foundling!"

"Yes"—with a sigh. "The kind gentleman and his wife adopted me, rearing and educating me exactly as if I had been their own, and I had a very happy home with them."

Old Jennette seemed greatly excited while listening to Marguerite's brief account of her life.

With murmured prayers and ejaculations she seized her companion's hand, exclaiming:

"The saints and the good God be praised! Jennette's prayers have been heard at last. Mademoiselle, I—I believe you are my darling's child. You are her image; you have her voice, her ways! Ah! something tells me that the old chateau will be desolate no longer—that voice and music and happiness will once more be heard in its grand old halls!"

"My dear woman, what you say cannot be possible!" Marguerite responded, with a skeptical smile; nevertheless her heart beat more quickly, and an eager

light had come into her eyes at her companion's words.

"Why not? Ah! why not?" Jennette eagerly cried. Then rising from her seat, she seized Marguerite by the arm.

"Come with me to the chateau," she said. "Her portrait is there. Her father painted it when she was twenty—only a little while before she fled, and but for the dress and the arrangement of the hair, all the world would say it was mademoiselle herself. Ah, come—will you come?"

Marguerite began to tremble. She was impressed, in spite of the many objections which arose in her mind.

Was the great secret of her life about to be revealed? She had never believed it would be possible. She had always been hopeless of ever learning the truth regarding herself, for there was no clew by which to trace her parentage. She had nothing in the world save those few lines which her mother had written begging Mr. and Mrs. Arnold to adopt her helpless child. But now it almost seemed as if this chance meeting with the aged peasant woman might possibly result in some revelation regarding her parentage.

"How far is it to the chateau?" she inquired, half tempted to yield to her companion's entreaty.

"Three miles—less than an hour's ride in the street cars. Will mademoiselle come?"

"Yes," she returned, with sudden resolution. "I will go with you. It can do no harm; and though I

cannot believe that there is the slightest relationship between myself and this young girl of whom you have told me, yet I would like to see her portrait and ascertain for myself if the resemblance is as strong as you have represented. We will take a carriage. I shall have to return and prefer to go that way, while it will not take nearly so long."

The woman appeared overjoyed by her consent. She seized her hand and pressed her lips passionately to it, murmuring prayers and thanksgiving to the Virgin and all the saints.

Marguerite led the way from the Louvre, obtained a carriage at a neighboring stand, and they were soon on their way over the Versailles road toward the Chateau Bernous.

On the way Marguerite questioned her companion more minutely regarding the history of Mademoiselle Delavigne.

"How many years is it since she disappeared?" she inquired.

"Twenty-four years last Michaelmas, mademoiselle."

"Ah, yes; you told me before—I had forgotten; and I am nearly twenty-three. How old was she at that time?"

"Twenty."

Marguerite felt strangely excited. If twenty-four years had elapsed since Marguerite Delavigne fled with the American student and she had been but twenty at that time, it was not impossible that Jenette's suspicions were correct.

"What was the name of the man whom she married?" she asked, wondering why she had not thought to inquire before.

"Ah, mademoiselle, that we know not," said the woman, sadly. "The master would never speak it. He forbade the mistress ever to utter it, and he forgot to—or he would not write it—when he made his will."

"It is surely a very complicated case if I am in any way connected with it," Marguerite murmured, thoughtfully, "and even though your surmises may possibly be correct, it would be a very difficult matter to prove that I am the grandchild of the great artist Delavigne."

"No! no! no!" cried Jennette, excitedly. "They will see your face—they will see the portrait—they will not doubt—they cannot doubt, and they will give you the estate. Ah! mademoiselle, to see the child of my blessed nursling in her mother's home would be a joyful day for old Jennette," and tears began to roll again over her cheeks.

Marguerite smiled at the woman's enthusiasm. It was evident that she had won the faithful old servant's heart.

They were drawing near to the old chateau, Jennette now told her as they rolled along a fine avenue lined on each side with grand and stately trees, and presently they came in sight of an imposing structure rising out of the midst of a magnificent park, its towers and turrets covered to the top with a luxuriant growth of ivy.

A wide carriage drive swept up to the grand entrance in the form of a half circle, and in another moment they were alighting before a broad stone porch, guarded on each side by stately lions hewn from solid granite.

CHAPTER X.

THE DELAVIGNE CREST.

Marguerite was thrilled by various emotions as she followed Jennette into the home of the great artist Delavigne.

Entering the lofty vestibule, she found herself looking through a pair of massive plate-glass doors into a magnificent hall finished in elaborately-carved oak, its elegant appointments giving her some idea of the elegance that awaited her beyond.

Pushing open the doors, Jennette held them thus while her companion passed in, then leading the way through the hall, she ushered her into the great drawing room on the right. Its furniture was rich in color and costly in material. Pictures adorned the walls—gems from many schools of art. Statuary gleamed in various nooks and corners, while choicest bric-a-brac from many countries met the eye on every hand.

On the opposite side of the hall were the library and reception rooms, all furnished with great taste and in the most luxurious style.

But Jennette was too anxious to show her young mistress' portrait to allow her guest to linger long below, and after a passing glance at this floor she led Marguerite up the grand stairway, whose massive bal-

ustrade was a marvel of rare and beautiful carving, to the second story.

Here there were suits of rooms for the accommodation of the household and their guests, all in keeping with the elegance below.

A passage led at right angles from this hall into a great wing, and this terminated in a spacious and lofty room known as the picture gallery.

"Here we are, mademoiselle," Jennette remarked as she threw wide the doors. "This was the pride of the master's heart, and yonder, through that door, is the studio where he used to work."

Marguerite looked around her with wonder and delight. The floor was of polished oak, inlaid in squares and other designs. The walls of the room were tinted in terra cotta and finished with an exquisite cornice of white and gold. The ceiling was paneled, and each panel contained a gem of art; while below, on the walls, tier on tier of paintings, portraits, etchings and engravings almost bewildered the eye.

Marguerite could not do much more than glance around this treasure house of art, for time was flying and she was anxious to see the portrait of that other Marguerite, whom she so strangely resembled.

Jennette caught her wandering glance, and interpreting it led her down the long room to an alcove where there stood an easel of ebony inlaid with pearl.

Upon it, covered with a heavy green cloth, there rested a large picture.

Jennette, with reverent hands, removed this, and lo! Marguerite's double was revealed.

"Why, how wonderful!" she involuntarily exclaimed, and then she stood rapt and silent before it, studying every feature and lineament with absorbing interest.

The painting represented a young girl of about twenty arrayed in a gleaming satin of pale yellow. The corsage was made low and with short sleeves, thus revealing the white, perfect neck and beautifully-rounded arms.

A wreath of purple, white and gold pansies, with dark-green leaves, extended from the point of the corsage at the waist up over the left shoulder, where it was fastened with a knot of ribbon.

A broad sash of the same rich colors shaded into each other was loosely tied at the back and streamed down to the bottom of the skirt.

In her right hand the beautiful girl held a dainty fan of pale-yellow ostrich tips, while her other hung with careless grace by her side.

The figure was tall and graceful and proportioned exactly like Marguerite's, while she stood looking a little over her left shoulder, as if to speak to some one just behind her.

It was an exceedingly graceful attitude; but the face—it might have been copied from that of the girl standing before it, it was so true to life.

There was the same shapely head, crowned with dark-brown hair; the same broad, rather low forehead, with a few light locks curling daintily about it. The brows also were straight, the large full eyes of the same wine-brown tint.

The nose was small and delicately outlined, the lips gravely sweet and wonderfully expressive. The chin had the same soft contour; the complexion was clear and cream like, but almost devoid of color, excepting the lips, which were vividly red. Truly the artist had been exceedingly fortunate in combining his colors to obtain the exact tints needed.

Marguerite stood fascinated, spellbound, speechless and thrilled to her very soul before this wonderful reproduction of herself—for so it seemed to her.

"It is very like, mademoiselle," breathed Jennette, who had been silently watching her.

"Yes, and I cannot wonder that you mistook me for your young mistress," she responded in a tone of awe.

"She must have been your mother, mademoiselle."

"I can almost believe it," was the low, intense reply. "Oh," she added, almost passionately, as she stretched out her clasped hands toward the picture, "if I could only know! Is there not some way to find out the truth?"

"Ah, dear heart, one need only to look at you as you stand beside the picture to know the truth," said Jennette, looking from one face to the other, conviction shining strong in her small black eyes. "But did mademoiselle never have anything that belonged to her mother?" she asked after a moment.

"No. I have nothing save a few lines which she wrote asking the people at whose door she left me to care for her child. But—stay! what is that?" Marguerite suddenly demanded, and turning very white, while she pointed with a trembling finger at a device

wrought in colored woods over the fireplace at one end of the room.

It represented a hand holding a palette and brushes, with a wreath of bay leaves about it.

"Ah, mademoiselle, that is the family crest," said Jennette. "There is a story that many years ago one of the Delavignes took the first prize at the royal exhibition of paintings, and was presented with a gold medal with this design engraved on it, and so the family adopted it as their coat of arms. But *mon Dieu!* mademoiselle! you are going to faint!" the woman exclaimed as she sprung toward her with outstretched arms.

"No! no!" Marguerite panted, but gladly accepting the support offered her, for she was trembling with excitement. "I am better," she added after a moment, "and, Jennette, that same device is stamped upon one corner of the paper on which my mother wrote her request to my adopted father!"

Jennette instantly dropped upon her knees at this intelligence, bursting into tears and piously crossing herself.

"I knew it—I knew it!" she cried. "Ah, dear lady, you will believe me now! Who else but my dear mistress could have paper like that in America? Holy Mother be praised!"

"It really seems as if it might be true," Marguerite murmured, thoughtfully, but still deeply agitated.

She trembled so that she could not stand and was obliged to ask her companion to get her a chair.

She brought it and set it before the portrait, and

Marguerite, sinking upon it, fell into a fit of profound musing.

Jennette watched her with wistful eyes for a few moments, then she stole softly from the room, her face all aglow with joy, but with tears streaming over her wrinkled cheeks.

She was gone perhaps fifteen minutes, when she returned bearing a tray upon which was arranged a dainty repast with a glass of wine.

"You are faint and weary, dear lady, from the ride and the excitement. Let me offer you a little refreshment before you return to the city," she said, her kind old face glowing with hospitality.

She wheeled a small table to Marguerite's side and placed the tray upon it with a deference and affectionate eagerness which betrayed her firm belief that she was the heir to and the probable future mistress of the Chateau Bernous.

Marguerite thanked her for the kind attention, and to please her ate what she could of the tempting lunch.

But she was too excited to think of much but the romantic tale to which she had listened and her own possible connection with it; and eager to get back to Reginald and tell him what she had learned, she soon arose to return to the city.

"Mademoiselle will come again? She will let me present her to Monsieur D'Artelle? She will claim the estate?" Jennette exclaimed with all the eagerness of a child as she accompanied her from the room.

Marguerite smiled.

"You dear, good Jennette!" she said, clasping her

warmly by the hand, which she had laid on her arm in her earnestness. "How faithful you are to the interests of your young mistress and her family. I cannot tell what steps I may take to ascertain whether I am connected with it. I must consult my husband first——"

"*Merci!* is mademoiselle married?" cried the old servant, aghast.

"Yes. I was married nearly two years ago to an American physician. My name is Marguerite Alexander," the young wife explained.

She thought that Jennette's face clouded over with disappointment at this information, for she returned with some embarrassment:

"Madame will excuse me for addressing her as mademoiselle."

"You are very excusable, Jennette. It was my own fault, since I did not correct you. Now I must go, but I shall like it very much if you will come to see me in a day or two," she concluded as she gave the woman her address.

"Madame is very kind," said the servant, flushing with pleasure.

"I will then tell you my own and my husband's decision regarding what steps we will take in the investigation of my antecedents. Perhaps we will want you to go with us to Monsieur D'Artelle."

"With pleasure, madame."

"Then I shall want to bring Dr. Alexander here," Marguerite continued, "to see this grand chateau, with

all these beautiful pictures, and especially the portrait which so strangely resembles me."

"Ah! welcome! It will gladden old Jennette's eyes to see madame here again," said the woman with a courtesy, her eyes shining with delight.

She led the way down to the entrance where the carriage was waiting, when Marguerite bade her good-by, shaking hands cordially with her, after which she entered her carriage and was driven back toward Paris.

It seemed to her, as it sometimes seems in vivid dreams, that she had lived weeks in that single day, while her varied experience filled her with mingled wonder, dread, and anxiety.

Wonder at the strange story she had heard and her remarkable resemblance to the portrait; dread lest upon investigation it should prove to be only a singular coincidence; and anxiety, greater than she had ever yet experienced, to discover her parentage.

In her own mind she was almost convinced that she was the child of beautiful Marguerite Delavigne, who had fled from her lovely home and adoring parents to marry an American student.

Then there arose the perplexing question: Who was this student and how did it happen that his young wife—if wife she had been—had found herself in such sore extremity in a strange land that she was forced to abandon her helpless child? Would she ever discover the man who was her father, and would the discovery bring her joy or grief?

She was pale and tired and not a little unnerved by the exciting events of the day when she reached home.

She found dinner nearly ready and Norah somewhat anxious because of her protracted absence.

She had just time to exchange her street costume for a pretty dinner dress before Reginald came in.

He looked grave and preoccupied, and paler, if possible, than when he went out in the morning, while he scarcely seemed to heed her greeting; but, sitting down to the table, mechanically began to serve the dinner.

He helped her, then himself, took one mouthful and pushed his plate away with a groan.

"I cannot eat—you will excuse me, Marguerite," he said, rising from the table.

She was greatly alarmed. Laying down her knife and fork, she sprung to her feet and to his side.

"Reginald, you are ill or in trouble of some kind! What is it?" she cried, searching his face anxiously.

He turned and looked at her for a moment.

"Nothing—that you can help," he answered, trying to speak calmly, though she could see that he was deeply agitated.

"Nothing that I can help," she repeated—"perhaps not; but, Reginald, I want to know it just the same," and she emphasized her request by clasping her hands about his arm.

He turned upon her almost fiercely.

"Then listen!" he cried, his voice shrill and harsh from the agony he was suffering. "I have to-day received another letter from my sister, and the man whom you have loved—whom you have allowed to destroy all the love of your nature—Noel Southworth—has also ruined the life of my poor Constance. He

is a defaulter to a large amount—he has deserted his wife and child; while I am here with my hands tied and cannot go to her——”

“Oh, Regi——”

Marguerite's pale lips articulated this much of his name, then her hands slipped from his arm, and before he realized how terribly he had shocked her she dropped helpless at his feet.

“Oh, what a brute! I believe I am beside myself,” Reginald exclaimed as he stooped and gathered her passionately to his breast. “Oh, my love—my wife, why could not you give me a little of the affection that you have wasted upon that wretch? Ah, why did I tell her so suddenly? But it maddened me to see her standing there so fair and lovely and know that she cares nothing for me.”

He laid her upon the lounge and set himself vigorously at work to restore her to consciousness.

She soon rallied beneath his efforts, and after drinking a glass of water sat up, but looked strangely confused.

“You were telling me something about Noel Southworth,” she said, looking inquiringly into her husband's face.

“Do not think anything more about it, Marguerite,” he said in a more kindly tone than he had used that day. “The man is not worth a single thought or regret from you.”

“Then it is true that he has become a criminal—that he has deserted his wife and child?”

“Yes, it is true.”

There was a moment of silence, then Marguerite fell back upon the lounge, sobbing bitterly.

Reginald had never seen any one weep so wildly, and he was alarmed by her excessive excitement.

"Marguerite, you will make yourself ill. I beg that you will be calm," he pleaded. "That man is not worth one of those tears."

But she paid no heed to him. The torrent of her tears would not be stayed until it was spent.

"How she loved him—how she loves him still, in spite of her denial the other night," was Reginald's inward comment as in dumb agony he watched her grieve, as he supposed, over the fall of her old-time lover.

If he could have known that she was weeping for joy and gratitude because she had been saved from the fate of Constance Alexander and was now safe in the care and protection of one of nature's noblemen, whom at last she had learned to love with all that was strongest and best in her nature, the reaction in his feelings might have been almost as impossible to control.

Gradually, however, she became more calm, while Reginald continued to sit beside her, feeling that it would be unmanly to leave her while she was so unnerved, but longing to get away to the seclusion of his office.

By and by he arose, mixed something in a glass, and brought it to her.

"I think it will be well for you to take this and then go directly to bed," he said as he held it to her lips.

She took the medicine unhesitatingly, then as she passed the glass back to him she asked:

"Now will you please tell me all about it?"

He frowned.

"I think you have had excitement enough for to-night," he remarked. "Some other time, perhaps——"

"I would prefer to know the whole truth at once," she interposed in a low tone.

Reginald drew a letter from his pocket.

"Here is my sister's account of the whole affair. You can read it if you like," he remarked, watching her curiously to see how she would receive this reference to Constance.

"Thank you," she quietly returned. Then lifting an appealing glance to him she added: "Forgive me, Reginald, for making you so much trouble when you are so deeply tried. I am sorry——"

"I have nothing to forgive," he coldly returned. "Shall I help you to your room now?"

Marguerite flushed. His manner was so distant, so coldly polite, she felt deeply hurt.

"No, thank you. I will lie here for a while, then Norah can go up with me," she said, with a sigh.

Reginald bowed.

"Is there anything more that I can do for you?" he inquired.

"Nothing, thank you."

He turned away, went directly to his office, and shut the door, while Marguerite, feeling as if she had thus been forever barred out of his heart, arose and dragged her weary steps up to her chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

"I WOULD LIKE TO POSSESS THIS PORTRAIT MYSELF."

After changing her dinner dress for a wrapper, Marguerite sat down by her table to read Constance Southworth's letter to Reginald.

The deserted young wife had poured out the whole burden of her soul to her brother. He was now her only living relative. She had no one else to whom to tell her sorrow, and after relating the sad story of Noel's betrayal of his employer's confidence and desertion of herself, she gave vent to all the wretchedness and perplexity which assailed her in view of her forlorn situation.

Marguerite's kind heart and all her tenderest sympathies were at once enlisted for the unfortunate young wife. All the bitterness which in the past she had experienced toward her had been wiped out with the revelation of her love for Reginald, and tears of sympathy now rolled over her cheeks, while she felt an inexpressible longing to comfort her husband's unhappy sister in her deep trouble.

As for Noel Southworth himself, she now regarded him only with supreme contempt, and wondered how she could ever have loved one so weak and unprincipled.

She felt deeply for Reginald also. It was no wonder

that he had been preoccupied and distant in his manner with such a burden as this on his heart, and she knew that it must be a matter of deep regret that he could not be with Constance to cheer and care for her in this time of trial.

It was dreadful for a delicate and sensitive woman to be left to face such sorrow and shame alone.

“And I might have been in her place to-day but for his weakness and faithlessness,” Marguerite murmured, with a shiver of repulsion. “What an escape for me! How thankful I should be, and I am, though it grieves me to know that another has been sacrificed in my stead. How strange that I did not learn to love Reginald before, for I have always realized his superiority over Noel Southworth. His nature is grand, his principles incorruptible, his heart true and tender as a woman’s. But mine had been seared—cauterized beyond all feeling by my troubles. And Reginald believes that I was grieving for Noel to-night. How he must despise me! What scorn there was in his words—‘he is not worth one of those tears.’ And yet I dared not tell him that I was only weeping for joy over my timely escape. Oh, how I longed to throw myself into his arms and confess that it was gratitude over the fact that I am his wife, instead of being bound to such a craven and traitor. Poor Constance! I wonder if she knows all my story? I wonder if she knows that her brother married me to save me from a fate that would have been worse than death? Ah!” she cried as she glanced down upon a slip of paper

that had fallen unobserved upon her lap; "here is something that I have not read."

She unfolded and read the following postscript:

"I fear I have wearied you with the sad story of my own trials, and have selfishly forgotten that you have wearying cares of your own. You did not say much about Marguerite in your last letter. Is she still gaining? Do you feel confident that eventually she will be entirely cured? God grant it, dear Reginald, for your sake, as well as hers, for I know how tenderly you love her, and you deserve to be happy if ever a man merited happiness. I was greatly touched by your account of Marguerite's efforts to make your home pleasant, and I feel that if I am ever permitted to become intimate with her I, too, shall love her very dearly. But Alice is calling me and I must go to her. Your loving sister,

"CONSTANCE."

Tears stood in Marguerite's eyes as she finished reading these few lines about herself, and with a heart softened and thrilled with a dawning affection for her husband's sister, she retired to rest and slept peacefully until morning.

When the husband and wife met at breakfast, Marguerite felt sure that Reginald had not rested at all, for he was pale and heavy eyed.

She greeted him with gentle sympathy, remarking in a sorrowful tone as she handed him his letter:

"Reginald, it is dreadful! Do you not think that you ought to go to your sister?"

He regarded her with surprise, and his face took on a softer expression as he met her earnest glance.

"I cannot do that, Marguerite," he replied, "for my contract with the faculty at the hospital will not admit of it; but if——"

He hesitated, as if in doubt of the wisdom of completing his sentence.

Marguerite looked up eagerly.

"Then let us send for her to come to us!" she cried.

"Do you mean it?" he exclaimed. "Could you bear, with the feelings you entertain toward her, to have Constance live with us?"

"My feelings have changed," Marguerite returned in a low tone and with downcast eyes. "All that old antagonism, that strange hatred, has vanished."

"Are you sure?" her husband demanded, a flash of joy for an instant illumining his eyes.

"Quite sure, Reginald, and I shall be glad to have her and her little one come to us if you are willing. May I write and ask her to do so?"

Reginald was so astonished at this proposition that for a moment he could make no reply.

"Would you not like it?" Marguerite questioned, lifting a pair of pleading eyes to his.

"Indeed I would if—I thought it would be wise," he answered, thoughtfully.

"You are hesitating on my account," Marguerite said, flushing. "Pray do not. I know that it would be a great relief for you to have Constance under your protection, and, Reginald, you know that I would do anything in the world for you——"

"Except one thing," he interrupted, bitterly.

The hot color flew to Marguerite's temples, and her heart thrilled with sudden joy at his words.

Now was her opportunity, and she resolved to make the most of it.

"Oh, Reginald, if you only——" she began, tremulously, when he cut her short by exclaiming:

"Pardon me, Marguerite. It is unmanly in me to keep referring to that forbidden subject. As regards Constance," he went on, without appearing to heed her eager gesture and effort to speak, "it would be the very best thing she could do to come to us, and it is exceedingly kind of you to suggest it. The proposition has relieved me more than I can express, for it tells me that you are indeed restored—that you need have no more fear of any further mental disease. I could not have had a better test of it than this. Yes, you shall write to Constance if you wish. I will myself answer her letter this morning, and will inclose your invitation with mine if you like."

"Thank you," Marguerite said, hastily, then added: "And now, Reginald, if you are in no special hurry, I have something very important as well as very strange to tell you."

"I am in no hurry. We are a little ahead of time, I perceive," he said, looking at his watch and wondering what the nature of her important communication could be.

She then related to him her adventure at the Louvre the previous day, the developments which followed it upon her visit to the chateau, her astonishment on be-

holding the wonderful portrait of Marguerite Delavigne, together with the discovery of the device, or coat of arms, above the fireplace in the studio of the artist, and which corresponded exactly with that stamped upon the paper on which her mother had written begging Mr. and Mrs. Arnold to adopt her child.

Reginald was no less amazed by these strange revelations than Marguerite had been.

"It certainly is the strangest story I ever heard," he said, "and it seems as if the old servant's surmises regarding your connection with the family must be correct. Still——"

"I think I know what you are thinking, Reginald," Marguerite remarked, with heightened color, "and I, too, have thought of the same thing. You fear that there may have been no legal marriage between my father and mother, and if such was the case, it might be useless to try to establish my identity or present any claims to this property."

"Those are points which would doubtless be advanced by Monsieur D'Artelle, the attorney," Reginald gravely remarked.

"Possibly he may know whether the marriage was legal or not," Marguerite suggested. "He may even have some proof of it and be able to tell us the name of Mademoiselle Delavigne's husband."

"That is true, and I think it will be wise for us to see him," Reginald thoughtfully replied, adding, "and there is one proof of your identity which I see might easily be established."

"What is that?" Marguerite questioned, eagerly.

"If there is any of Mademoiselle Delavigne's handwriting in existence and it should correspond with that of your letter, it would be almost indisputable proof that you are her child."

"But that would throw no light upon the question of her marriage," said Marguerite, with a troubled look.

"No; but, as you have said, monsieur may have some facts which will do so. I think I can arrange for a visit to him this afternoon if you would like."

"Yes, if it will not inconvenience you. I cannot rest until this matter has been investigated," Marguerite said, with some agitation.

"Can you be ready to go with me at two?" Reginald asked.

"Whatever hour will be most convenient for you will suit me," she replied.

"Then we will say two. Meantime, if you will get your letter to Constance ready I will post it with mine on my return to lunch."

Marguerite looked up with a flush of pleasure.

"Then you will come home to lunch to-day?" she said, eagerly.

"Yes, I think so, as we are to go out together," he said, regarding her curiously, and wondering if she had indeed missed him so very much.

Marguerite promised to have the letter ready, and then bidding her good-morning, Reginald went away to his work at the hospital.

The young wife did not feel quite so disheartened

as on the previous evening. Reginald had talked freely with her regarding her recent adventure; he had appeared deeply interested in her story, and seemed anxious to interview the attorney and also to visit the chateau with her.

The coming investigation would, she hoped, tend to draw them nearer together, and she resolved to do all in her power to make him comprehend the change in her feelings toward him.

Oh, she thought, if she only dared go to him and frankly confess that she loved him, it might, perhaps, banish that look of weariness and misery from his dear face and exorcise the spirit of bitterness that he had displayed of late.

But when she thought of doing this, she feared that he would not believe her sincere after her recent unreasonable anger over his deception regarding his name. He might imagine that she felt ashamed of her former attachment to Noel Southworth since he had brought himself into such disgrace, and so, as a matter of policy, was trying to conciliate him.

She spent most of her morning writing her letter to Constance, and had it ready when Reginald came home to lunch.

She handed it to him unsealed.

"Please read it," she said, "and see if I have said all that you could wish."

"I am sure that you have," he courteously replied as he took it and slipped it into his pocket without even glancing at the superscription, and evidently without any intention of reading it.

Marguerite flushed. She wanted him to read it and was deeply hurt that he would not.

But she was too proud to beg it as a favor, and so said no more about it.

Immediately after lunch they went out to seek Monsieur D'Artelle.

They found him readily, and were received by the suave attorney with true French politeness, the gentleman evidently perceiving that he had cultivated people to deal with.

He listened with deep interest to Marguerite's story, and seemed to be impressed with the plausibility of it.

He questioned them both very minutely regarding all the details, and critically examined the letter which Marguerite's mother had written.

The crest stamped upon the paper was an exact reproduction of the family coat of arms, he said, and it certainly seemed as if Mademoiselle Delavigne must have penned the lines upon the sheet.

He could not say, positively, however, for he never remembered having seen any of her chirography, but possibly there might be some of her letters among her father's papers, all of which were in his possession.

He would look and see if they could spare the time to wait.

Certainly they would wait, Reginald returned, and the distinguished attorney immediately began his search.

He brought forth from an inner office a small trunk that was filled with papers and letters of every description, and proceeded to look them over.

Everything had been carefully preserved, he observed, as it might some time prove to be of interest to the heir or heirs, if they were ever found.

Marguerite watched him with intense interest.

It seemed to her that she *must* learn the truth regarding her antecedents; that she could not go on all her life in doubt and darkness, never knowing who her parents were nor to what name she was entitled; and yet she realized that much pain might result from such knowledge.

A diligent search of fifteen minutes brought to light a small package, which caused Monsieur D'Artelle's eyes to gleam with satisfaction.

Replacing all other papers in the trunk, he then arose and passed the package to Marguerite.

It was composed of several letters bound together with a rubber band.

"If madame will examine these she may possibly find something to her advantage," the attorney remarked, with a polite bow.

Marguerite seized it eagerly, and drawing out one of the dainty missives, saw that it was addressed to "Monsieur Albert Delavigne, Paris."

Unfolding it, she found that it had been written at the Convent of the Sacred Heart only three years previous to the date of her own letter.

It was written in French, but the handwriting was identical with that in her possession, only her few lines had been hurriedly penned in English. But to her great joy and gratitude she saw in the upper left-

hand corner of the dainty sheet the Delavigne crest, exactly as upon her letter.

She was greatly agitated, so much so that she could not speak, and she silently passed it to Reginald.

He saw at once that the same hand must have penned both epistles, and after reading a few sentences and satisfying himself that the phraseology was similar, he returned it to the envelope and handed it, with the others in the package, back to Monsieur D'Artelle.

He carefully arranged them all together as he had found them, remarking, with a thoughtful look, as he turned to Marguerite:

"Madame, I have not a doubt that Mademoiselle Delavigne was your mother. I have a strong belief that you are the granddaughter of Monsieur Delavigne, the artist."

"And therefore heir to his estate?" Reginald said, inquiringly.

"Ah, monsieur, that I cannot say," replied the Frenchman, with a somewhat doubtful shrug of his shoulders. "That will have to be as the court decides. If we but had the proof of mademoiselle's marriage, the affair would not be so complicated. If monsieur desires we will look into the matter, and then, if the court will admit the claim, madame will find herself the happy possessor of a magnificent estate."

"Then we will leave our case in your hands, Monsieur D'Artelle," Reginald replied. "It seems to me, with the similarity of handwriting and the strong resemblance between Mrs. Alexander and the portrait of

Mademoiselle Delavigne, that there must be some hope for us."

"The resemblance is certainly striking—indeed, wonderful!" monsieur remarked, with his admiring eyes fixed upon Marguerite's lovely face. "If we had but the proof of the marriage, or the name, even, of mademoiselle's supposed husband, that we might advertise for him, it would be a great help. But Monsieur Delavigne in his will does not mention the name or existence of such a person; and though diligent search has been made for many years, we can learn nothing about him."

Reginald discussed various points with him for a while longer, then he and Marguerite took their leave, but not feeling very much elated by the result of their interview.

As the afternoon was not far advanced, Reginald said there would be ample time to drive out to the chateau, and accordingly they turned their horses' heads in that direction.

The drive was delightful, and this relaxation from care, together with the change from city to country, produced its effect upon Reginald, making him more social and more like himself than he had been for several days.

This so encouraged Marguerite that her spirits arose, Hope whispered that perhaps this trip would give her the opportunity she so earnestly desired, and by the time they reached the chateau she seemed as bright and blooming as a girl in her teens.

Jennette was overjoyed to see her again, and courte-

sied with reverence to Reginald, although she watched him very jealously out of the corners of her bright black eyes.

She conducted them over the magnificent building, which seemed even more beautiful to Marguerite than during her previous visit, and when at last Reginald stood before the portrait of Marguerite Delavigne, astonishment held him spellbound.

"It is something wonderful!" he exclaimed after regarding it in silence for several moments. "It is seldom that two people, however closely connected, resemble each other so strikingly. It almost seems as if the picture must have been painted from your own face, Marguerite."

"Yes, I felt that way myself when I saw it yesterday," the young wife returned.

"It is, indeed, a remarkable likeness! I—I would like to possess this portrait myself," Reginald said in a musing tone.

"Would you, really, Reginald?" Marguerite cried, and under the impulse of the thrill of delight which his words caused her she laid her prettily gloved hand upon his arm.

CHAPTER XII.

MARGUERITE MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Her touch thrilled him, as it always did, and he turned to look into her face.

He was astonished as he observed the expression of happiness that illumined it.

Her eyes were bright, her cheeks softly flushed, and a smile of pleasure curved her lips.

Could this radiant being be the passion-tossed woman who had fainted at the mention of her old lover's dishonor—who had wept with such abandon over her dead hopes only a few days ago? he asked himself.

What could this strange change mean? And that homely old saying, "Off with the old and on with the new," forced itself upon his mind.

Then he instantly reproached himself for having thought anything so ignoble of his refined and single-hearted wife; for at least she had always dealt frankly with him. Still he was greatly puzzled by her manner.

"Yes," he said in response to her question and in a matter-of-fact tone as he moved to another part of the room, "for I doubt, even though you should sit yourself, that you would get so faithful a likeness."

Marguerite sighed, more at his tone than his words, and a shade of disappointment settled over her face.

Jennette showed them about more thoroughly to-day, and when they had visited almost every room in the chateau, she called her husband and bade him conduct them over the stables and grounds.

Everything was in prime order, and Reginald felt that it would be a noble inheritance for any one to possess.

Would he like his wife to become the mistress of it? he asked himself.

No. He wished that she had not a single dollar in her own right—he wished that she was entirely dependent upon him; then he believed there might be some hope of winning her priceless love.

Still, if it would make her any happier to unravel the tangled mystery of her birth, he would aid her to the extent of his power to do so.

They rode back to Paris just at sunset, Marguerite chatting with more freedom and cheerfulness than she was in the habit of doing.

When at last they entered their own pleasant little home, where Norah had the table daintily set for dinner and the savory meal just ready to serve, Marguerite looked up into her husband's face and remarked, with touching earnestness:

"It was all very beautiful and elegant out at the chateau; but, really, Reginald, I believe I should regret having to leave our cozy home to go into such stately magnificence."

Again Reginald regarded her with astonishment.

There was a tender smile on her face, and her eyes

were roving about their pretty parlor with a gaze of real fondness not to be mistaken.

He could not reconcile her present mood with the recent past. The only way he could explain it was that perhaps her victory over her feelings toward his sister Constance might have softened her, and this new gentleness was the result of it.

He made no reply to her remark, but with a slightly skeptical smile on his lips, went on to his office to see what calls he had had during the afternoon.

Several months passed without producing any radical change in the relations of the young husband and wife. Reginald, although kind as ever, preserved a dignified reserve, which effectually restrained Marguerite from revealing the true state of her feelings toward him.

In due time letters had come from Constance, thanking them both for their kind invitation to her; but she could not come to them, she said. There were various reasons why she preferred to remain in San Francisco, and chief among them was that if Noel should return he might find her waiting there to receive and help him to a better life.

One morning Marguerite started forth at the usual hour to take her music lessons, but upon arriving at her teacher's studio, she found him engaged with some one upon an unforeseen matter of business.

This delayed her somewhat, and it was nearly eleven before she was released; but as there were still two hours before lunch and the morning was so lovely,

the air so fresh and balmy, she resolved to go for a short stroll in the Place de la Concorde.

In spite of the barriers which still existed between herself and her husband, she was not unhappy, because she was always conscious of the growing love in her own heart, and the hope of ultimate victory was at times strong within her.

This morning she seemed unusually bright and cheerful. She never had felt so well physically, and with elastic steps and in conscious sympathy with all the loveliness about her, she looked the personification of beauty and happiness.

"I feel almost like one of those pretty birds trilling so sweetly in yonder tree," she murmured as she strolled beneath the overarching foliage. "I have not a care, I am well and strong, and life is very beautiful, although I shall never be quite happy until Reginald knows all my heart and every barrier between us is removed. I try to show him that I love him, but I am afraid he distrusts my sincerity. I can see that I am a puzzle to him, and my cowardly heart always fails me whenever I attempt to betray a little fondness for him and that bitter, skeptical smile curls his lips. But he is my husband, his home is mine, and—I love him!"

If Reginald could have heard those last softly spoken words and seen the lovely blush that accompanied them, he could never have doubted again that the heart of his beautiful wife was won.

"I can scarcely wonder at his skepticism," she continued, "when I remember the display I made on the night he told me about Noel——"

"Marguerite!"

The name was uttered in her ear with a startling distinctness that made her heart leap into her throat and her brain to reel with a sudden fear.

She had been walking along the shady path with bowed head, her thoughts so intent upon her husband and her relations toward him that she had paid no heed to the direction she had taken nor to the people who were passing.

Now, as her name was uttered, she looked up, to find herself in an almost deserted walk and confronted by Noel Southworth himself.

Instantly every drop of blood fled from her face, her eyes dilated with amazement and aversion, while she recoiled from him with a gesture which but too plainly expressed the loathing she experienced.

"Marguerite!" the man repeated, while he regarded her with mingled astonishment and admiration, for she seemed more beautiful than he had ever seen her.

She recovered herself almost instantly, but not a vestige of the old feeling stirred within her at the sound of his voice.

Drawing herself proudly erect, she coldly inquired:

"Were you addressing me, Mr. Southworth? Perhaps you have forgotten that I have changed my name since I last met you."

"Ah, yes. Pardon me, Mrs. Knox," he began, with a light, mocking laugh.

"My name is Mrs. Alexander, if you please," Marguerite quietly interposed.

The man started. He had supposed her to be still in

doubt of her husband's identity, and so was taken aback by the fact that she had learned the truth regarding him.

He realized also that there was not now the slightest evidence of insanity about her. She certainly was well and more lovely than ever, and, if appearances were not deceitful, she was really happy in her present circumstances.

"You are pleased to be ceremonious, Mrs. Alexander," he remarked with a bow and an ironical smile. "Perhaps you would prefer to ignore my presence entirely."

"I certainly would have preferred not to meet you," Marguerite calmly returned.

"That is flattering, surely, especially after the familiarity of bygone years," Noel Southworth retorted, with a bitter curl of his lips.

She did not deign to notice this reference to their former relations, but asked in a grave and somewhat authoritative voice:

"Why are you here—in Paris?"

"Well, several circumstances combined to bring me here," he responded in a careless tone. "Business, for one thing; a natural desire to revisit the gay city, where I have spent so many pleasant days; and last, but not least, knowing that you were here, I hoped that I might learn something about—Constance and Alice."

This last reason was given with downcast eyes and heightened color, showing that the man had something of natural feeling left within his heart.

Marguerite's lip curled.

"You come to *me* to inquire about your heartbroken wife and helpless child!" she cried, her face glowing with scorn, her tones ringing with contempt.

"To whom should I go?" he demanded, with a flash of anger. "I have watched for you daily for nearly a week. If I should go to the doctor he would probably thrash me within an inch of my life."

"You are mistaken. He probably would not deign to touch you," Marguerite scornfully replied, adding, with quiet pride: "My husband is a gentleman."

Noel Southworth cringed.

"Your 'husband!' One would almost imagine that you had married a man you loved, rather than a physician to attend you," he sneered.

Marguerite raised her clear brown eyes and gazed steadily into his, a glad light shining in them, a glow of tenderness suffusing her face, her lips tremulous from the thrill of joy in her heart.

"I do love my husband with my whole heart," she said, with simple earnestness; and he knew that she spoke the truth.

The declaration angered while it also astonished him, for it wounded his vanity to find that he had been so readily supplanted by another in heart of the woman to whom he believed he had once been indispensable.

"Indeed! Then how exceedingly fortunate it was that you were saved from making an irreparable mistake a few years ago," he retorted, with a bitter smile.

"I think so," was the calm reply, "and I cannot be

too thankful. But, oh!" Marguerite went on, with sudden feeling, "my heart bleeds for that sweet, gentle woman who did make such a great mistake. Noel Southworth, how could you do such a cowardly thing as to desert the wife who has been so faithful to you?"

"What was a man to do? I—well, I suppose you know the whole story," he replied, with a half-defiant air, though a flush of shame tinged his cheek. "Would you have had me remain quietly in San Francisco, only to be arrested and imprisoned?"

"But such an alternative need never have existed if you had been true to your trust," Marguerite said, sternly. "How could you bring such shame upon those who loved you so?"

"One must live," was the sullen reply.

"Yes, one may live," Marguerite gravely returned, "but one has no right to live dishonestly."

The man flushed hotly.

"Dishonestly!" he repeated, sharply.

"It is dishonest to live beyond one's income, as you have done, and it always leads to deeper sin. How could you—how *could* you so betray the trust of Constance Alexander, that gentle, loving, faithful little woman, who would have devoted her life to you?"

"It appears to me that your sentiments regarding my wife have undergone a radical change," Noel Southworth retorted, sarcastically.

"They have; or, rather, the evil spirit which possessed me has been exorcised and I am myself once more."

"Ah! And pray what has brought about such a desirable restoration?"

"Change of scene, tender care, and the influence of a happy home."

"What a paragon of excellence you have secured! You are to be congratulated, Mrs. Alexander, upon the possession of such a husband," her companion sneered.

"Reginald Alexander is the grandest man living," Marguerite earnestly returned.

"And so the old lover suffers by comparison," Noel cried, with a bitter laugh.

Marguerite did not deign any reply to his observation.

"Aha! silence gives consent," he continued; then he added, more earnestly: "Do you utterly hate and despise me, Marguerite?"

"I wish to hate no one. I have no right even to condemn, for there is no one who has not some weak point—who is not liable to yield to temptation unless he is fortified by strong principles and noble purposes. But we cannot respect a person who is wilfully ignoble," Marguerite concluded, gravely.

"Wilfully ignoble! And you apply that term to me!" the man demanded, flushing again.

"Have you not been wilfully ignoble?" Marguerite questioned, lifting her clear, earnest eyes to his. "What you have done has been done because you deliberately chose to do it—because you would not live within your means and deny yourself. All your life you have weakly and selfishly pampered your own

tastes and desires, to the exclusion of the rights and feelings of others. You have stood first in everything; you must not be disappointed, no matter who else suffered in consequence. I can look back now dispassionately and read you more truly than I did once. Years ago I believed you to be good, noble, generous; now I can see that though you appeared to be so on the surface, you were thoroughly selfish at heart."

"You are complimentary, surely," Noel ironically observed, but with averted eyes.

"I do not say this from any feeling of personal ill will," the beautiful woman responded, "for I have none. I have so entirely recovered from my infatuation that I have not now the slightest feeling of anger or bitterness toward you."

"'Infatuation!' You call it that?" her companion demanded, sharply.

"I do. I can see now that it was nothing more," she returned, with a positiveness that was convincing. "I imagined that I loved you. I might have gone on imagining so if you had not proved false to me—had I not had the opportunity to learn that I was capable of an affection that was deeper, truer, holier, and more absorbing. Thus I can ignore the past—bitter though it was for the time—in the more perfect joy of the present. But, Noel Southworth, having won Constance Alexander to be your wife, you had no right, under any circumstances, to desert her, leaving her to face alone a carping world, leaving her to poverty and shame. Oh, can you blame any one for feeling that a man who could be guilty of thus using a delicate, sen-

sitive wife is little and mean, weak and cowardly?"

"Those are hard words, Marguerite."

"They are," she assented, "but they are none too severe if they will restore you to your better self—if indeed anything of true manhood exists in your nature."

"You misjudge me—you cruelly misjudge me," he faltered, shrinking under her words as under a lash.

"Prove it, then."

"How can I prove it?"

"By turning right-about here and now," Marguerite said, earnestly, "by going back to your wife, pleading for her forgiveness, and lifting her burden of toil and shame from her shoulders."

"Go back to San Francisco! Go back to be arrested and imprisoned!" Noel Southworth exclaimed, aghast.

"Not necessarily," Marguerite returned after thinking for a moment. "I know that you have stolen a large amount of money—it is plain talk, I know," she interposed as she saw the angry blood mount to his forehead, "but it is the truth, although a portion of the sum has been paid."

"What! Who has paid it?" cried the man in a tone of amazement.

"Constance herself."

"Constance!"

"Yes. She sold everything that your house contained and paid almost every dollar of the proceeds to Ames & Worthing toward canceling what you took from them, and what she assumes is now her debt."

"Her debt!" said Noel in a wondering tone.

"Yes. She claims that she will yet pay every dollar of that stolen money if she can have but health and plenty of work to do."

"Heavens!" cried the astonished husband. "I never dreamed that she would do such a thing! I thought perhaps she might sell the furniture and live upon what it would bring until I could turn myself and get into some profitable business, when I intended to send for her and Alice."

"You do not know the stuff of which your wife is made, Noel Southworth," said Marguerite, sternly. "She inherits the same noble qualities, the same fine sense of honor which my husband possesses, and already she is at work toiling for the support of herself and child and saving every dollar possible to redeem as far as she can her husband's credit."

"It never entered my head that she would attempt such a thing," faltered the man, with pale lips. "I thought that Reginald would help her until I could turn myself."

Marguerite's lips curled, but she quietly replied:

"He would be glad to help her. We both would be glad to have her come to us, and have begged her to do so, but she utterly refuses to be dependent upon any one. Let me tell you, however, that Constance is not strong enough to cope with the world single handed. Her strong will power, her energy and perseverance may sustain her for a time, but I fear she will eventually break down beneath her unaccustomed burdens. So I say to you, go back to her—take up your burden like a man, and win back not only her respect and the

world's but your own self-respect also. I believe that she loves you yet, in spite of the terrible test to which you have subjected her affection; but let me tell you no woman's love can long endure such a strain, and you will gradually lose your hold upon her if you do not make amends. You have spoken of the fear of arrest and imprisonment if you should go back. If that is all you have to fear, why will you not restore the amount you have taken, make terms with your employers, and thus pave the way toward a better life?"

"I cannot. I have invested the whole in an Australian wool venture. I am here in Paris now in connection with the business," Noel replied.

Again Marguerite bent her head in thought, but finally she asked, with impressive seriousness:

"If I will advance the remainder of the sum of which you defrauded Ames & Worthing and thus release you from the fear of arrest, will you go back to your wife and child, take them again under your care, and make an effort to redeem the past?"

CHAPTER XIII.

REGINALD SECURES AN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENT.

Noel Southworth regarded the woman before him with unfeigned astonishment, in view of her generous proposition.

"You would do this for me, Marguerite?" he exclaimed when he could find voice.

Her lips curled scornfully. The egotism of the man in thus appropriating wholly to himself her magnanimous offer, imagining that she had made it only out of regard for him, aroused her deepest contempt.

"No, not for you, only as I would be glad to help you, like any other erring fellow being, toward a better life," she responded, trying to speak calmly; "but for the sake of your gentle wife, for the sake of your innocent child, upon whose life I cannot bear to think that the curse of her father's dishonor must always rest; for the sake also of my husband, who deeply feels the humiliation to which his sister has been subjected, I would do much more. Will you accept my offer?"

The man did not at once reply. He stood absorbed in thought, anxiety and perplexity written upon his brow, a vacillating, half-sullen expression in his averted eyes.

It was evident that a struggle was going on within him—evidently that Marguerite's proposition had ap-

pealed to whatever there was of manliness in his nature; that he would like to be reunited to his wife and child—would like to have the guilt and danger incurred by his crime all wiped out.

Marguerite watched him with almost breathless interest, while she seemed to read as if from a printed page the conflict between his weakness and selfishness and the love for those who should have been his first and only thought.

Which would conquer, she wondered, manly principle together with natural affection, or a weak, craven fear and shame to face those whom he had wronged and the frowns of the fickle world?

She had not long to wait.

"I cannot, Marguerite," he said at last in a complaining tone. "It would crush me to go back to San Francisco and face the people whom I used to know. You have no idea how sensitive I am—how keenly I should suffer under the coldness and neglect of the high-toned people with whom I used to associate."

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, the supreme contempt in her tone stinging him like the cut of a lash and making him realize how utterly mean, selfish, and ignoble he appeared to her, "and how about the sensitive wife, who not only has had to bear the disgrace of her husband's crime in the face of these same high-toned people, but the deeper humiliation of desertion as well?"

"But it is different with her, for she doubtless has the pity and sympathy of every one," he whined.

"And do you think it is easy for a refined and delicately organized woman like Constance to bear the pity

of a scoffing world?" indignantly retorted Marguerite. "Oh, Noel Southworth, you are even less a man than I thought you lately, and I marvel that I was ever so blind as to imagine that I loved you. You are supremely selfish to the very core of your being. Go your way if you will not be saved. I would gladly have helped you for Constance's sake; but since you are so lost to all sense of manliness and honor, I am tempted to think that she will be better off without you, while I never wish to look upon your face again."

She turned abruptly from him and walked swiftly toward an exit from the park without giving him a chance to utter a word in reply.

"Zounds! if she had been a man I would have fought her for that!" Noel Southworth angrily exclaimed, but with a flush of shame crimsoning his face while he watched with a fascinated gaze Marguerite's graceful form as it disappeared around a curve in the path. "Not but that I'd like well enough to have that money paid back to Ames & Worthing," he said, "so that I could return to my own country if I should ever wish to; but as for returning to San Francisco to face all my old friends, I can't quite make up my mind to that. If she had only proposed to negotiate a settlement with the firm herself and then send for Constance to meet me here, there would have been some sense in it. No; I'll see what my Australian venture will do for me, and if I can make a handsome sum, as I hope, I will send for Constance and Alice to come to me, and we'll start again on a new basis in some place where we are not known. But why on earth did I

not ask her what the poor girl is doing and get her address? Here I've been watching for a chance to speak to her for that very purpose, and now have missed it," he irritably concluded, and then turned with a frowning brow and went in an opposite direction.

Marguerite was so wrought up by this interview that she felt she must regain her composure before meeting Reginald, who was going to be home to lunch to-day. Therefore, instead of taking a car or a carriage, as was her custom, she resolved to walk the whole distance.

She also wished to consider whether she ought to tell her husband of her meeting with Noel Southworth.

"He has been working so hard at the hospital that he is not quite himself," she mused. "Then, too, he is worried nearly to death already about Constance. It can do no possible good for him to know that Noel is in Paris, since the man is too selfishly bound up in himself to heed any reason or advice, and it would only excite and humiliate Reginald to meet him. No; I believe it will be best for me not to tell him—at least for the present. Some time I will relate the whole interview to him, for I do not wish to have any secrets from him. Oh, If I could only speak as freely to him as I did to Noel Southworth just now I should be happy. How easy it was for me to tell him that I love my husband—how I gloried in the telling of it; and yet when I attempt to show Reginald anything of my heart I am a veritable coward. If he would not hold

me at such a distance it would be easier. Oh, will I ever find the courage to leap the barrier?" she concluded, with a sigh.

Reginald and Marguerite had led a very uneventful life during the last few months.

The young physician, accepting the fact, as he regarded it, that Marguerite would never change her attitude toward him, had gone on the even tenor of his way, trying to forget himself and his pain by devoting himself more assiduously to his profession; and so, while he was as kind and attentive to her needs as ever, there was a gravity and sadness, almost amounting to sternness, about him that repelled her and held her at arm's length.

She believed that she had tried him too far by that last display of feeling when he told her of Noel Southworth's crime; while he, feeling that she could not forgive him the deception which he had practiced upon her, tried to resign himself to the inevitable, and thus laid out a course of action which would keep him so busy that he would have no time to brood over the ruin of his hopes.

He sometimes wondered at the change in her, for she was always cheerful, while at times she seemed really happy; but he laid it to the enjoyment which she derived from her own congenial pursuits, rather than to any alteration in her feelings toward him.

She continued her painting and music while she was also making a study of French literature and perfecting herself in the language, and all this tended to

develop and refine her, until Reginald felt that she was fitted to shine in the highest circles of any country.

In her painting, especially, she showed great progress, although since that morning when Reginald had appeared so indifferent to the landscape with which she had taken such unusual pains to please him she had never called his attention to her work. But he was not unmindful of it, and he fully believed that she had inherited her talent from her mother's father, the eminent artist, Monsieur Delavigne.

This was the state of their domestic relations when the attorney, Monsieur D'Artelle, waited upon them to inform them of the decision of the court regarding Marguerite's appeal to be recognized as the child of Marguerite Delavigne and heir to the Delavigne estate.

It was to this effect: that while the court recognized the probability of her claim, it could not grant her possession of the property unless the validity of her mother's marriage could be established.

The registers of nearly every parish in Paris had been searched with the greatest care, for Monsieur D'Artelle appeared really anxious to win the case for his beautiful client, but no record of the event could be found.

The will of Monsieur Delavigne had given all his possessions to his daughter conditionally. If she should return to Paris or could be found within ten years from the date of his death, she was to come into the property of her ancestors, provided she had in no way brought disgrace upon the family.

On the other hand, the estate was to be sold and the proceeds turned over to increase the Fund for the Perpetuation of Art, in Paris, while all his pictures and other works of art were to be presented to the Louvre.

Meantime the estate was to remain exactly as he left it, a certain amount to be expended each year to preserve both the chateau and grounds in the best order.

Eight years had already elapsed, and as matters now stood it seemed likely that at the close of two more the beautiful estate would pass into the hands of strangers and all its treasures become public property, and Marguerite was exceedingly disappointed upon hearing the decision of the court.

"It is not the property that I care particularly for, but the establishment of my identity," she remarked, sadly, while discussing the matter with Reginald after the departure of Monsieur D'Artelle.

"Yes, it would be a noble inheritance," Reginald responded.

"True, for one who coveted it," Marguerite replied, with a smile in which there was a tinge of bitterness, for she told herself she could never enjoy the possession of so much wealth if Reginald refused to share it with her. "I do not care for it," she added, "but I do covet some of those priceless pictures, and most of all that portrait of my mother; for I am convinced that Marguerite Delavigne was my mother."

"I, too, would like you to have it," Reginald said, "and I shall make an effort to get it for you, even if

we make no new discoveries during the next two years."

"Oh! do you suppose there is any possibility of our getting it?" Marguerite exclaimed, eagerly.

"I think so," her husband replied. "I shall lay the whole matter before the trustees of the Louvre, and I have strong hopes that they will think that you are entitled to that single relic of your ancestors."

"I should so like it," said Marguerite, wishfully; and Reginald resolved that the coveted picture should be hers if money and eloquence could achieve it.

"Reginald," the young wife eagerly exclaimed after a thoughtful silence of several moments, "since Jenette asserts that my mother eloped with an American, how would it do to insert in several American newspapers an advertisement requesting information regarding the gentleman who married Marguerite Delavigne, of Paris?"

"It would be a very wise proceeding," Reginald returned with a smile, "and your suggestion has already been anticipated, for I myself authorized Monsieur D'Artelle this very day to attend to the matter. It is strange that neither he nor I has thought of doing this before and thus saved a good deal of time. I did not think it best to mention the arrangement to you, as I did not like to encourage hopes that may never be realized. The advertisement inquires simply for Mademoiselle Delavigne or her heirs."

"Reginald," cried Marguerite, tremulously, as she impulsively leaned toward him and laid her hand upon his knee, "how good you are to me! How kind and

thoughtful you have always been! I am very grateful—I——”

Ah! she made a mistake in telling him that, and she saw and regretted it the moment the words were uttered, for his face clouded and all his dignity and reserve returned. What did he care for her gratitude? The very sound of the word was hateful to him.

“I am always glad to contribute to your happiness,” he stiffly remarked. “It is my duty as well as my pleasure. But,” he added in a matter-of-fact tone as he arose and her hand dropped apparently unnoticed from his knee, “I hope you will not expect too much from this advertising, for I should be very sorry to have you disappointed. There is the office bell, and I must go.”

He went out, and Marguerite, with a heavy sigh, turned to her piano to practice, while a blush of mingled shame and anger suffused her cheek; for somehow Reginald’s manner had made her feel as if she had been guilty of an unwarrantable liberty in allowing herself to be so familiar with him.

She believed that her touch had been obnoxious to him, for he had immediately risen and chilled her with his coldness and dignified reserve.

“I am afraid I shall never win him. He seems to take it for granted that we shall never be anything but friends to each other; or rather he treats me like a child who must be humored and have every desire gratified,” she cried, while indignant tears leaped to her eyes.

“Why will he be so blind? Why can he not see for

himself that all my feelings have changed—that I adore him with my whole soul?” she murmured, tremulously.

“Tell him?” she continued, as if in reply to some question that had risen in her mind. “I can’t. I cannot go to him and meekly say, ‘Reginald, I love you at last.’ I cannot humbly beseech him to overlook the foolish infatuation I have so often betrayed to wound him and receive me at this late day as his wife. Ah, how keenly he cut me when he told me that I was simply his housekeeper! I am beginning to believe that he is growing to regard me only in that light or perhaps as some ward, the responsibility of whom is becoming more and more irksome to him.”

She had wrought herself up to such a pitch by these reflections that she must have some outlet to her feelings, and so dashed into her exercises with a passionate vehemence which attracted Reginald’s attention and made him wonder why she was so reckless of time and expression, for usually she was the most conscientious of students.

Truly these two were living at cross purposes, and it seemed as if they were likely to go on so indefinitely, for both were blind—both were proud and sensitive and could not therefore rightly interpret the feelings and acts of each other.

Meantime Reginald was rising to eminence in his profession.

One of the leading physicians connected with the hospital received an appointment in another institu-

tion, and thus a vacancy was made which must be immediately filled.

Dr. Marton, who stood at the head of the medical faculty, had long recognized Reginald as a physician possessing unusual skill and ability, and having also been upon the most friendly terms with him ever since he became connected with the hospital, at once proposed that Dr. Reginald Knox Alexander be appointed to the place of the retiring incumbent.

A unanimous vote was cast for him, and he was thus raised to a place of prominence, with more than double the salary he had been receiving.

Marguerite was very proud of this honor, but in Reginald's morbid state he attributed her enthusiastic expressions of delight to the fact that his honors also reflected prestige upon her because she bore his name.

Feeling that he could now afford a more luxurious home, he proposed that they should exchange their present quarters for a more fashionable locality.

He was somewhat surprised when she objected in the most decided terms to making any change in their manner of living.

"But why?" he gravely inquired; then added, without waiting for her reply: "Marguerite, I took **you** from a luxurious home, and now that I can afford it I wish to restore you to one equal to that which you left."

"Simply as a matter of duty?" she inquired, with a tinge of sarcasm and flushing to the brows.

It galled her to feel that he was so punctilious re-

garding his fancied obligations to her, when he had always refused to receive anything from her.

"I would like to see you in a more fitting home," he remarked, evasively.

"I have never complained. I have been perfectly content here," she returned in a low, constrained tone.

"I know that you have never complained," he responded, more kindly. "You have appeared to be perfectly content and have done your duty most faithfully in making this home comfortable and delightful. But since I am now able to live in a better way, I think it would be advisable to change."

"If you feel that your present position demands it, that you need to live more on an equality with your associate physicians, I shall acquiesce in any arrangements you may think best to make," Marguerite replied, yielding at once her own preference, but beginning to feel homesick already in view of leaving the pretty home where she had learned to love her husband, while she feared that if they went into fashionable life Reginald might become absorbed in the requirements of society and thus her chances of winning his love would be lessened.

"I do think it would be better for both of us," Reginald said, decidedly, and, tacitly accepting the situation, Marguerite quietly made her preparations, and another month found them located in a more aristocratic portion of the city.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONSTANCE RECEIVES A LETTER.

We must now go back several months, to ascertain how our poor little deserted wife is prospering in San Francisco.

When Constance went up to her room after her drive with Laurence Everet, she deliberately sat down and gave herself up to serious consideration of her situation.

She reviewed all that Professor Gardiner had said to her upon the subject of divorce, what Laurence had also advanced upon the same matter, together with his declaration of undiminished affection for her.

"No. I could never do it," she mused. "I do not believe one has any right. I will cling to Noel as long as he lives. Perhaps he may some day repent of his wrongdoing and return to me. If he does, I will do all that I can to help him back to an upright life. I will begin this very night by writing to him. I will write a letter every day—that is, begin a sort of diary in the form of letters—and when I can find out his address I will send them all to him, to show that I have been faithful to him."

It was a noble resolve, and the young wife proceeded to act upon it without delay; and every night, upon her return from work, she would write out the events

of the day in the form of a letter, adding some tender message of gentle counsel and earnest entreaty for his reformation.

The weeks lengthened into months, the months into more than a year, and she received no tidings from the absent one. It was very trying, very discouraging; but the gentle woman had been rightly named, for there was an element of constancy in her nature that never wavered, neither could it be crushed, and she seldom failed to write something, even though it was but a few words, to show her husband that she did not forget him—that she never wavered to her allegiance to him.

She toiled on at her work with the professor until his book was finished and another begun; while he had been so pleased with her diligence and the interest she had manifested that twice he voluntarily increased the amount he was paying for her services.

It was a very liberal remuneration, and once Constance remonstrated against receiving an advance; but Professor Gardiner was growing very fond of his faithful amanuensis, and seemed to regard her with something of the sympathy and tenderness of a father.

Constance was very saving. Every dollar she could lay aside from her income was conscientiously deposited in a bank, and at the end of a year she took two hundred dollars more to Mr. Worthing toward canceling her husband's debt.

"I do not feel right to take it, Mrs. Southworth," he exclaimed. "Truly it seems almost like blood

money to me, and I wish you would never come to me again upon an errand like this."

"But I must, Mr. Worthing," Constance firmly responded, "for if I live every dollar of that money shall be paid."

"Then," the gentleman smilingly returned, "I wish some good friend would will you a fortune, so that you might get rid of the burden all at once and be relieved of such wearing anxiety."

"Pray do not be disturbed about me," Constance replied, with a brave, cheerful face. "I have a great deal to comfort me. I am well, I enjoy my work, and I have many kind friends."

But in spite of the bold front she assumed she had many sad hours, and hope deferred often made her sick at heart.

She suffered most when little Alice questioned her about "papa," as she often did—where he had gone, when he would come back again to take them to their pretty home.

"Ah, when?" Constance would cry out in anguish of spirit at such times; and it seemed as if, indeed, there was no silver lining to her cloud of sorrow.

Laurence, however, was a never-failing source of comfort to her, for no week passed that he did not manage to see her two or three times, while books, fruits and flowers coming upon other occasions testified to the faithfulness of her friend.

True to his promise, he never again referred to the one forbidden subject, but was always a kind adviser, a cheerful companion, a tender brother, and she re-

lied upon and confided in him with the same freedom and trust that she would have manifested toward Reginald.

But patient waiting brought its reward at last.

One morning, just after Constance had seated herself at her copying, some one tapped upon the door of the outer office.

Professor Gardiner had not yet come in, and Constance was herself obliged to answer the summons.

Upon opening the door she found a tall, bronzed stranger standing without.

He bowed courteously, then inquired:

"Is this Mrs. Southworth?"

"Yes. That is my name," she quietly returned, but wondering what the man's business with her could be.

"Are you alone?" he asked in a lower tone than he had previously used, and glancing cautiously within the room.

"Yes. Professor Gardiner will not be in for fifteen or twenty minutes yet," Constance answered, but looking rather surprised at his question.

"That is well," said her visitor, "as I wished to see you alone. My name is Stanton. I am a friend of your husband and I have a message for you——"

"From him—from Noel!" Constance gasped, growing so white that her companion thought she was going to faint.

"Yes, from your husband," he answered as he entered the office and brought a chair for her. "Pray be seated, madam. I am sorry to have unnerved you so; but Mr. Southworth enjoined me to use the utmost

secrecy in communicating with you, as he does not wish any one else to know his whereabouts."

"Where is he?" Constance cried in an agonized tone, while she was so excited that she could not control her agitation.

"In Australia."

"Oh! so far away?"

"Yes, and he is doing very well, or was when I left; but was longing to see his wife and child and gave me a letter to deliver into your hands."

"A letter from Noel! Oh! give it to me!" the trembling woman cried, eagerly.

Mr. Stanton drew a bulky epistle from his pocket and handed it to her.

Constance seized it with shaking hands.

"Please let me finish my message," the gentleman said, "then I will leave you to read your letter alone. Mr. Southworth thought you might have some word to send him in return, and if so I am to give it into the hands of the captain of the steamer on which I came to San Francisco, and which will sail on its return voyage in about a week. I will call upon you in a few days. Mr. Southworth knows the captain, and anything you may choose to send will be perfectly safe with him."

"I will write. I will have something ready for you," Constance said, with pallid lips. "I—I shall be more composed when you come again. You must excuse me, but you have taken me by surprise. I thank you, however, very much for your kindness——"

"That is all right. I am very glad to have been of

any service to you," Mr. Stanton interposed, and anxious to get away from the sight of her pale face and anxious eyes.

His heart was full of pity for her, for he saw that her agitation was almost uncontrollable.

He bade her good-morning, bowed himself out, and Constance was alone.

For many long months she had hoped and prayed for some word from her husband. The answer had finally come, but had found her utterly unprepared to receive it.

A letter from her husband was at last within her hands! His handwriting before her eyes, and yet she almost dreaded to break the seal—she almost shrunk from reading the words that he had penned to her.

Was she glad to get it? She believed so.

Was she thankful to learn that he was still living and that his heart turned yearningly to her in that far-off land? She hoped so, and yet her sensations were somewhat strange.

A year and a half he had been away from her, and she had schooled herself to something like resignation to his absence—to the necessity of living without him and relying upon herself; and now to hear directly from him seemed to arouse anew all the old anguish and shame and humiliation she had suffered upon first learning of his crime and desertion.

She gradually became more calm, and finally broke the seal and unfolded the letter.

It was written from Sydney and read thus:

“MY DEAR CONSTANCE:—You will see from the heading of this where I am. I have been here for more than a year and am engaged in the wool traffic, with the prospect of doing a fine business if all goes well. I do not know how this letter may find you—whether you are so hardened against me that it will embitter you still more, or whether you yet cherish in your heart something of tenderness for your truant husband and of sympathy and pity for a lonely and unhappy man. I know that I was weak—heartless, if you will—in leaving you as I did; but I had not the courage to face the horror and sorrow which I knew you would experience if I confessed my wrongdoing and contemplated flight. I knew it would be arrest and imprisonment if I remained in America, while there was a chance that I might start anew in some other country if I could but safely get away, where I hoped to make my fortune and ere long restore the money that I appropriated from Ames & Worthing. You will say that I had no right to sin to attain such an end. I know it, but what could I do with my hands shackled with debt? I know, too, that I was a brute to leave you to face the scandal alone. But I long for you and the baby. I long to begin life anew with you, and I promise that henceforth I will live honorably, and as soon as I am able I will restore all that I took and pay every debt. If you can forgive me—if there is still in your heart some of the old love for me, I pray you to send me some message by the vessel which conveys this to you, and if it be one of pardon and faithfulness—though I know I am undeserving—I will

make arrangements for you to come to me by the next steamer; that is, if you are willing to do so. I hope by another year to be established in business upon a firm basis, and if I can but have you and Alice with me to comfort and cheer me, I can yet attain an honorable position in life. One line—one word from you will be my salvation. Constance, save your still loving but erring husband.”

There was much more regarding his life and plans for the future, all of which seemed to be very plausible and encouraging.

Constance sat like one dazed after reading her letter. She could hardly realize that at last she had heard from the wanderer.

She had dreamed of hearing from him often. Was she dreaming now?

No. There were the words in black and white, the familiar handwriting; there were the foreign-looking paper and envelope, and the evidence was too tangible to be doubted.

And yet she wondered why she was so heavy hearted instead of being filled with joy and gratitude over the news from her long-absent one.

She was glad to hear from him, she told herself; glad to know that he was living and well.

She was glad to know that he yearned for her and his child; that he was sorry for the way in which he had left her; sorry for the crime which had been the cause of his flight.

But she was deeply troubled over the thought of his

trying to build up his fallen fortunes upon the money which he had stolen; that he should want her to come and share his life, when they would be obliged to live upon the proceeds of his crime.

Could she do it? Would it be right for her to do it? Could she leave her own country and sail alone with her child for that distant land?

How glad she was that the professor happened to be late that morning—that he was not present to see the struggle that was going on in her mind, for she was so unnerved that she could not have concealed her agitation from him.

Ah! must she leave San Francisco and go to Australia? Leave dear, kind Professor Gardiner, Mr. Worthing, and—Laurence?

Tears sprung to her eyes and she was strangely depressed. She looked around the pleasant office, thought of her congenial work, in which she had become almost as deeply interested as the professor himself, and she shrunk from leaving it and her kind friends to go to the untried realities of that distant country.

Many doubts beset her also.

Suppose she should go and Noel should be led into extravagance and wrongdoing again; what could she do, a stranger in a strange land, without a friend to whom to appeal? What employment could she find there if anything should happen to oblige her to depend upon herself again?

She strove to silence these doubts, and reproached herself for them, feeling that she ought to trust Noel

more fully; but they rose again and again, in spite of all arguments against them.

She told herself that it would be her duty to go to Noel if he desired and needed her. "For better or worse," she had promised, and she must trust to Providence that it would be for the better.

"It may be for his salvation, as he has written," she murmured, "and if I can save him I must not consider my own feelings. Neither must I allow him to feel that I doubt him in the least, for it would tend to make him distrust himself."

Yet she could not fully decide the matter then. She was still too unnerved to be able to reason calmly, and putting away her letter, she tried to concentrate her thoughts upon her work.

When Professor Gardiner came he saw at once that something was wrong. She was nervous and absent minded, her hand was unsteady, her face flushed, and her eyes unnaturally bright.

"I am afraid you are not well this morning, Mrs. Southworth," he remarked as he came to her desk to give her some directions and noticed how her hands trembled.

His tone was so kind and fatherly, and as she looked up into his face and saw how concerned he appeared to be she broke down utterly, and dropping her head upon the desk, burst into tears.

"Ah, poor child, you are in some trouble," he said, as he gently laid his hand on her head, and she instantly resolved to confide in him.

"Oh, Professor Gardiner, I know I can trust you,"

she remarked, as she passed him Noel's letter. "Will you please read this? and then I would like to talk with you about it."

He took the missive, retired to his own desk, and read it through without comment, although his face expressed both dismay and disapprobation at its contents.

When he finished it he quietly laid it down and waited for Constance to speak.

"You see, Professor Gardiner, that I shall have to leave you," she remarked in a tremulous voice, but without looking up.

It seemed as if her courage must fail if she met his kind eyes.

"Then you have made up your mind to go to your husband?" he said, inquiringly.

"I—I think it is my duty," she replied.

"Do you wish to go, Constance? Would you be happier to go?"

"One is always happier to do one's duty."

"Is it your duty?"

"It seems so to me," she gravely replied.

"You must consider the matter carefully. You must take no step that you will afterward regret," her companion returned. "It will be a long and wearisome journey for you, a rough voyage for your child. Then you know nothing about the country; you have no friends there; you would be an utter stranger to every one save your husband, while you have no assurance that he will be able to provide comfortably for you. And—pardon me, but I feel that I ought to

set the matter before you clearly, as I would to my own daughter if I had one—you have no surety that you might not be liable to another experience such as you suffered here a year and a half ago.”

“I have thought of all that,” Constance quietly replied.

“There is one thing more,” said her friend as he searched her beautiful face. “You must forgive your old friend for speaking so plainly, but my interest in you will not allow me to keep anything back. Do you still love Mr. Southworth well enough to make this sacrifice? Has not your faith, your affection been so shattered by his treatment of you that you cannot fully trust him nor be perfectly happy in living with him again? You are very sensitively organized, my dear child; you require kindness, refining influences, and congenial companionship. Mr. Southworth may have been a gentleman to all outward appearance when you married him. Constant association with polite society required restraint and conformity to certain rules of etiquette; but—I speak from some knowledge—when a man has lived in a rough country like Australia, without the restraints of home life and the refining influences of cultivated people, he will be liable to retrograde unless he has strong principles to sustain him. I pray that you will consider all these things before you take a step which you may regret later.”

Constance had flushed vividly at the beginning of his remarks, then she had grown very pale; but the light of a strong purpose gleamed in her eyes.

“I know what you say is true,” she replied, “but I

think my duty is plain before me. Noel is my husband. I promised to cling to him in sickness and health, for weal or for woe. I will be true to my marriage vows, Professor Gardiner, for I may be his salvation, as he said in his letter. I will do my part as far as I know it; God must do the rest. If he can be saved to be a noble and useful man in the future, I will not spare myself. I shall write and tell him this, then wait to hear from him again. I would go to him on this vessel that is about to return if it was not for Alice; but I dare not take her on such a journey without knowing what provision has been made for her at the other end."

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG WIFE'S RESOLVE.

Professor Gardiner gazed upon Constance with profound admiration, which was nevertheless mingled with something of sadness, as she revealed her purpose to him.

"If there were more women like you in the world, Mrs. Southworth, there would be fewer unhappy marriages," he remarked; "and yet if you were my daughter I should object to your taking a delicate little child like Alice, and making such a journey alone. I should say wait until your husband is able to come for you."

"But he dare not come," Constance interposed, flushing a deep crimson. "He would fear arrest and imprisonment."

"That could easily be averted," gravely returned the professor. "If Mr. Southworth would pledge himself to return the money which he took from Ames & Worthing, I feel sure that he could return without fear of trouble from the firm that he has wronged. And, my dear child, I feel that he owes it to you, if to no one else, to make some such pledge before asking you to go to him."

"It would be a great relief to me if some such arrangement could be made," Constance replied, with a sigh. "Perhaps Noel will be willing to do so. I shall

suggest it, and if I go to him he may be encouraged, his ambition may be aroused to redeem his character thus in the eyes of the world and of his former employers."

Professor Gardiner saw that she was determined to go—determined to cling to the man whom she had married, so he said no more, although he greatly feared that her future would be a sad one.

He had seen enough of human nature to prove to him that when a man of Noel Southworth's stamp had once let down the bars of principle and compromised himself as he had done, it was very doubtful if he ever reattained a high moral standard.

When Constance went home that evening she wrote far into the small hours of the morning.

And what a letter it was! So full of gentle forgiveness and kindly encouragement; of wifely counsel and self abnegation. She spoke of her gratitude upon receiving tidings of him; gently chided him for having kept silence so long instead of trusting her, when she would have been glad to share every hardship with him—to have been a comfort and help to him.

"To prove this," she wrote, "I will inclose letters which almost every day I have penned to you."

"Diary letters," she called them, which would tell him that she had never swerved from her allegiance to him, and also something of the life that she and Alice had led during his long absence. Telling him of her work with Professor Gardiner, how she had yearned to hear from him, how intensely she had longed to

know how and where he was, and to be with him to cheer and comfort him in his exile.

Yes, she told him, she would go to him whenever he wished, only she hoped that he would first take some step toward a settlement with Ames & Worthing, who had been very kind to her ever since he went away. She felt sure they would be willing to make easy terms with him, and then they could begin life once more without the burden of a great wrong resting upon them.

Nearly one-fourth of the amount, she wrote, had already been paid, and when they were settled she would help him to save—would be very economical and assist him to make his payments to cancel the remainder.

There was not a single word of reproach or blame in the whole letter; no complaint regarding her own struggles and trials, nor concerning the shame and humiliation she had had to bear in his stead.

There was no word of censure because he had left her and her child in such a cruel way, making no provision for their support.

It was a kind and wifely letter—a womanly, forgiving epistle, showing a faithful, conscientious spirit that must have moved the most calloused heart by its pathos and tender sympathy.

She made up her package, inclosing pictures of herself and Alice, which had been recently taken, then sealed it, with a prayer for the wanderer and for strength and wisdom for herself in the future.

When she went to the office the next morning she

took it with her, that it might be ready when Mr. Stanton should call for it.

But the excitement of the last twenty-four hours had worn upon her sadly, and Professor Gardiner's heart ached when he saw her pale face and heavy eyes, for he well knew the struggle which must have been going on in her mind.

Three days later Mr. Stanton called for the promised letter and took it directly to the steamer, where he confided it to the captain with minute instructions regarding the delivery.

Mr. Southworth would doubtless call for the package immediately upon the arrival of the vessel, he told him, for he was expecting it. At any rate, it must not be intrusted to any one who did not give that gentleman's name as authority.

And so that little package of mercy and constancy went on its way.

* * * * *

In that distant land Noel Southworth waited most anxiously for the return of the vessel which was to bring him encouragement or despair.

After asking Constance to pack his valise on that last evening that he had spent in his own home, and watching her as she slowly went upstairs to do his bidding, he turned to his desk, collected all papers of importance, made them into a package, and concealed them about his person.

Then he gathered up all bills and business letters, threw them into the grate, and watched them with a

bitter smile on his lip as they blazed brightly up, then smoldered to a pile of ashes.

It was long after midnight when this task was completed, and he heaved a sigh of relief when the last drawer was emptied of its contents.

Then he stole softly upstairs to the chamber where his wife and child were quietly sleeping.

The gas was turned down, but not so low that he could not plainly distinguish every object in the room.

His little one was in its crib, which was drawn up close beside its mother, who lay with her face toward her child.

She was slightly flushed, and her lips were parted just enough to reveal the edge of her pearl-white teeth. One fair hand lay carelessly upon her breast and half concealed by the soft lace of her dainty nightrobe, which gently rose and fell with her regular breathing. Her beautiful hair had been loosely gathered into a knot, but a few light locks lay upon her white forehead, and to her husband she had never seemed one-half as lovely in her waking hours as she did now in this attitude of graceful abandon with all her senses locked in slumber.

He stood there for a long time gazing at her, a tremulous quiver about his white lips, as if he felt that this might be his last look in life.

He longed to imprint one farewell caress upon her brow, but he could not do this on account of the crib, which was between them, and he was obliged to content himself with leaving a soft kiss upon the rosy, velvet cheek of his child.

Then, with another lingering look at his wife, he stole as softly out as he had come, securing on his way his valise, which Constance had carefully packed and locked ready for his departure.

It was a gloomy brow and a pale, pained face that he cautiously let himself out of the house just as the gray dawn was breaking and with rapid steps made his way to one of the piers, where a noble vessel was being put in readiness for a long voyage.

It was to leave early with the incoming tide, and most of the passengers had gone aboard the night before.

Noel had purchased his ticket the previous evening, just as the office was on the point of closing, and been booked by the name of Leon Worth, and now upon boarding the vessel he went directly to his stateroom.

It was a long and tedious journey, and to the gay society-loving man, with his luxurious tastes and desire for constant change and excitement, it seemed endless; for he dared not mingle with the other passengers for fear that some one might identify him, and he was anxious that no one in San Francisco should suspect whither he had gone.

Therefore he feigned seasickness and kept himself close in his stateroom.

He had provided himself with plenty of interesting reading matter, but even with this help to kill time he grew terribly restless and homesick and impatient of the long confinement.

Upon arriving at Sydney he spent some time in looking about to see what prospect there was for busi-

ness, and finally invested a large amount of money in the wool trade.

At first, by sheer luck, he did very well; but he had no real knowledge of the business, and finally, after indulging in a reckless speculation, lost every dollar that he had.

Almost in despair over this misfortune, he fell back into his old habits, drank considerable, gambled some, and for several months lived from hand to mouth.

Finally, resolving to do better, he secured a position as clerk in a large exporting wool house, and for a time conducted himself very circumspectly.

It was while thus employed that he was sent by his firm to look after some business in Paris, and thus met Marguerite, as already related.

After his interview with her he had no desire to encounter Reginald, although he had intended seeing him and soliciting his aid in getting started for himself again when he should return to Australia.

His firm, however, were so pleased with the manner in which he had conducted their affairs in France that they increased his salary and gave him an interest in the business.

This greatly encouraged him and aroused his ambition, but it was a very different life from what he had been accustomed to lead, and he often wearied of the drudgery and the coarse, rough people with whom he was obliged to have dealings, and longed for Constance and his child, with the luxuries of his former life in San Francisco.

It was while laboring under depression of this kind

that he learned that Mr. Stanton, a gentleman whom he had found more congenial than his other Australian acquaintances, was about to make a trip to San Francisco, and he resolved to write to Constance and confide the letter to him.

We know the reception it met and the reply it evoked.

But several weeks must elapse from the time of sending the message before Noel could get a reply, and he became exceedingly restless and nervous. At times his hopes were raised to the highest pitch, at others he would be almost in despair.

Time passed and the vessel was due in about a week, when Noel was informed by the senior partner of the firm that it would be necessary for him to go to Melbourne and into the surrounding wool district upon important business.

Noel thought that he could not tear himself from Sidney until after the arrival of the steamer, and begged for a delay of a week or ten days, or that some one else might be sent in his place.

He was told that this would be impossible. The business would not admit of delay, and the junior partner, the only other person who could be trusted, was ill and could not go. There were important negotiations pending in Sydney which no one but the senior member could transact, and therefore Noel must go.

He was greatly troubled, for he did not know what to do about the letter which he expected to receive from Constance.

He had given explicit directions that it should be

delivered directly into his hands, or to some one whom he should commission to receive it.

After thinking the matter over, he concluded to confide in one of the clerks, ask him to watch for the arrival of the steamer, and go to the captain to inquire for his message.

The young man appeared perfectly willing to undertake the commission, promised faithfully to be on hand when the vessel came into port, and, somewhat relieved in his mind, Noel started out upon his trip.

The steamer made unusually good time and arrived a little ahead of the date advertised, but the clerk was careless and utterly forgot Noel's instructions until the vessel had discharged her cargo, reloaded, and sailed again.

He was greatly disturbed when, all too late, he remembered and realized how negligent he had been, for he knew that the errand must have been very important, or Mr. Southworth would not have been so excited and nervous about the matter.

"What in thunder shall I do?" he soliloquized in dismay as he was returning from the steamship company's office after learning the truth. "Southworth will be mad enough to kill me and will probably give me the grand bounce. He will be back in a few days, and I shall have to give an account of myself."

He thought of all sorts of evasions and excuses, and finally made the cowardly resolve to tell him that he had seen the captain, who told him there was no letter or message for him.

And this was the report which Noel received upon his return.

Of course he believed it, for he had never had cause to doubt the young man's word, but it was a terrible blow to him.

He actually staggered like a drunken man, looking for a moment as if he would drop dead, and so frightened the lying clerk that he hastened to get out of his way as soon as possible.

"Great Scott!" he muttered when he was beyond hearing distance; "it must have been something very serious to cut him up like that. I'm extremely sorry I forgot the errand, but it won't do to confess it now, and my bread will do dough if he ever finds it out."

Noel was almost ill for several days from his disappointment.

He believed that Constance could not forgive him. His letter had said, "*If you can forgive me, send me some message.*" But no response had come, and the natural conclusion was that she would never overlook his crime and desertion, and was therefore lost to him forever.

Perhaps, he thought, with a bitter groan, she had already applied for a legal separation, to which his desertion would entitle her, and was even now free from him.

Should he never see wife or child again? Was he absolutely cut off from them for all time?"

His heart was filled with despair. He was alone in a strange land; he was weary of the life he was lead-

ing, homesick, and longed for the thoughtful care, the genial companionship of woman.

From his earliest remembrance he had been petted and indulged; he had scarcely ever known a wish ungratified, and the long months since his flight had been full of hardship and a "longing after the flesh pots of Egypt."

Then his despair was followed by a season of anger and resentment.

"Constance was cruel, unwifely, heartless," not to have taken some notice of his letter. He had confessed his sin and promised to do right in the future, and she might at least have sent him some word of cheer and encouragement, even if she could not make up her mind to come to him.

He could not give her up; he could not live and think that his dear ones were lost to him. Oh! it seemed as if he had never known such craving for love before, such heart hunger for sympathy and congenial companionship.

Then it came to him, with a shock that sent a hot blush of shame to his cheek, that now he could realize something of what Constance had suffered when she discovered that she had been deserted; when he had left her, without a word of farewell or explanation, to battle alone with the dishonor he had brought upon her; to breast the world single handed and in a state of harrowing suspense regarding his fate that must have well nigh crazed her.

Was she repaying him in his own coin? Was she

taking this way to retaliate for the great wrong he had done?

No. He could not believe that, for he knew that Constance was too noble and conscientious to be guilty of exercising a petty spite against any one.

There was only one explanation he could think of that was at all satisfactory to him. Either Mr. Stanton had not been able to find her in San Francisco, and so could not deliver his letter to her, or she had become so hardened and embittered against him that she could never forgive him, and so thought best to ignore him entirely.

But this seemed cruel and unlike her, for if she had resolved never to live with him again she might at least have stated it frankly, and thus ended his suspense once and for all.

He wrought himself up to such a state of nervous excitement that he could neither work by day nor sleep at night; and finally, to drown his misery, he resorted to his old habit of drinking, and thus for a time stupefied his brain beyond the power to think or suffer.

This course caused his employers to lose confidence in him. He was sharply reproved for his conduct, which so angered him that in a moment of passion he threw up his contract with them, and taking what money he could raise, he bought out a sheep farmer who made all the money he wanted and was about to return to civilization, and buried himself and his woes in the country a hundred miles from Sydney, having given up all hope of ever hearing anything from wife or child.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PLEASANT TRIP IS PLANNED FOR CONSTANCE.

Long months went by—weary, heart-wearing months to faithful Constance, who waited and watched, while she worked, for some response to the letters she had sent to her husband.

None came, of course, and no one can know the suspense and anxiety which she suffered.

It wore fearfully upon her, and she lost flesh, strength and color.

She could not understand her erring husband's silence.

She did not once think of such a thing as her letters missing him, for Mr. Stanton had told her that she could trust the captain of the steamer implicitly—he had been personally acquainted with him for a long time and knew him to be a perfectly reliable man.

Mr. Stanton himself had gone to New York. She did not know his address, therefore she could not appeal to him in her perplexity, while she knew neither the name of the captain nor that of the steamer by which he had returned from Australia to California.

She wondered at and reproached herself for her negligence on this point. It was an oversight for which she could not forgive herself; for if she had known she might easily have secured an interview with

the captain and learned whether her package had been delivered to Noel.

Laurence was very kind to her—a great comfort and support during this time of trial. He made every effort to learn by whom she had sent her letters. He interviewed the captain of every steamer that came into port from Australia, but could learn nothing for a long time.

At last he discovered, by the merest accident, that the first officer of a certain vessel was taken very ill just as his ship was about to leave Sydney, and his place had to be filled by a substitute.

Captain Shaw was his name, and he commanded the stanch steamship *Lavater*, and doubtless he was the man who had been intrusted with Constance's precious message. This was something gained, but of course nothing further could be ascertained until he should resume his command.

Constance felt as if she could not endure this interminable waiting, and imagined all sorts of dreadful things.

She pictured her husband sick and no one to care for him; dead, and no one to send her tidings of his fate.

Professor Gardiner became alarmed at her failing health and urged her to go somewhere into the country to spend the warm months, but she said, with a weary sigh, that she must not leave her work.

Laurence also was deeply troubled about her, and during a confidential talk with Professor Gardiner remarked:

"I believe she will soon go into a decline unless she

has some chance to counteract the depression into which she has fallen.

"I fear so, too," his companion returned, "and I am continually urging her to rest, but she absolutely refuses to leave her work."

"I wish she could have a long trip somewhere," said Laurence, thoughtfully. "I think continuous travel and sightseeing would do more for her in her present condition than any quiet resort; it would not give her so much time to think."

"I believe you are right," Professor Gardiner answered.

"You have met Mrs. William Noble, I believe?" Laurence remarked, inquiringly.

"Yes, and a charming woman she is, too; in fact, she is one of the most intelligent ladies I have ever met," his friend replied, but wondering somewhat at the young man's irrelevant remark.

"Well, she, with her mother and a widowed aunt, is about to make a trip to the Atlantic coast. They will make short stops in most of the large cities through which they pass; spend a couple of weeks in the Adirondacks, another week at the White Mountains, then return by the way of Montreal, the Great Lakes, and the Northern Pacific route."

"That will be a grand trip," said Professor Gardiner, enthusiastically. "I should not object to making it myself."

"Do you mean it? Could you spare the time?" Laurence eagerly demanded.

"Yes. I am not so very busy just now. My print-

ing is being somewhat delayed, and I think a journey of some sort would be beneficial to me—brighten me up to do better work afterward. Were you thinking of going along and asking me to be your *compagnon de voyage*?" the professor smilingly concluded.

"Something of that nature," Laurence replied. "I have business which will take me to New York very soon, and Mr. Noble asked me if I would act as escort to his ladies during the trip. It occurred to me that it would be just the change that Mrs. Southworth needs, if she could be persuaded to go. I know, of course, that she will object both on account of leaving her work and the expense; but I thought if you could convince her that it is necessary for you to go to New York, Boston, Montreal, or any other places you choose, and would need her services to copy whatever notes you might make on the way, we could easily meet her objection to leaving her work, while I would defray the expense—she, of course, to know nothing about it; but be made to believe, if you like, that the trip will be given her in part remuneration for her services. How does the plan strike you?"

"Everet, my friend, I believe you are a master hand at a plot!" Professor Gardiner cried, delightedly. "It will be just the thing, and I am with you heart and soul. Only if the little woman is to accept the journey in lieu of salary, I shall of course share the expense. When do these ladies start?"

"One week from to-day. Can you leave by that time?"

"I will manage it some way," said his companion,

with animation. "But I wonder how Constance will arrange about the little one?" he concluded, with sudden gravity.

"Mr. and Mrs. Worthing are exceedingly fond of Alice—she spends a good deal of time and is very happy with them—and I know they will be delighted to care for her during Mrs. Southworth's absence," Laurence responded, with a confidence which betrayed that he knew whereof he spoke.

"You think of everything, my boy. That is an excellent plan. Now, will you confide our intentions to her, or shall I?"

"Oh," returned Laurence, flushing slightly. "I shall leave it to you, if you please, as I do not wish to appear in the matter at all except as a fellow passenger."

"All right. It will be just as well, perhaps, as our little friend is very keen and proud. She might suspect your agency and object to the plan," responded the professor, who, being exceedingly keen himself, had long since fathomed Laurence Everet's secret love for his beautiful amanuensis. "But," he added, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "how will this addition to their party suit Mrs. Noble and her friends?"

"Mrs. Noble is one of the few who have remained staunch and true to their friendship for Mrs. Southworth. I can answer for her that she will be delighted to include her, as well as Professor Gardiner, in her party. I will see her to-day, however, and confer with her regarding the matter, that you need not be in

'doubt upon the subject," Laurence concluded, with a smile.

"All right, my young friend. Go ahead and make your arrangements, and I will see that my copyist comes along with us," replied this great-hearted man of science, who was beginning to look forward to the proposed holiday with almost as much eagerness as a schoolboy to his vacation.

An hour later he told Constance in the most matter-of-fact way imaginable that he had contracted to furnish certain material for a new encyclopedia which would necessitate a visit to several points in the United States and Canada. -

"I think," he added, reflectively, "I would like to take you with me to make up the manuscript from my notes as we go along. It will save my going over them the second time in making my explanations to you, while seeing the different places yourself will be a great help to you in your work. What do you say? Could you leave the little one without worrying over her?"

Constance appeared greatly surprised by the proposition, for this was the first that she had heard about material for a new encyclopedia.

"Yes, I could manage about Alice well enough," she thoughtfully replied, "but—wouldn't such an arrangement be very expensive? Traveling costs so much."

"Well, no; not if you will do as I want you to," said her friend, bending a somewhat anxious look upon her.

"I have always tried to be obedient," Constance answered, with a faint smile.

"Well, then, to be frank, you need change—you must have a change," he returned, earnestly, "or I shall lose my amanuensis altogether and your child will lose her mother. Now, if you are willing to accept this trip as part of your salary for the services you will render me, I shall regard it as a favor to myself, while I am sure it will be of great benefit to you."

Tears sprung into Constance's eyes as she turned to her friend.

"Professor Gardiner, I am afraid this is merely a plot on your part to force me into taking the rest which you claim I need," she said, tremulously.

"No, indeed, it is not 'merely a plot on my part,' as you call it," he retorted, truthfully, but with a sly smile as he wondered what she would say if she knew that Laurence Everet had planned the affair. "I confess, however," he added in a confidential tone, "that as my own special work is not driving us just now, I am glad of this proposition regarding the encyclopedia"—he had contemplated refusing it until he heard Laurence's plan—"as it will give me change and work at the same time. More than this, I have had an invitation to join a pleasant party who are going East and whose society I shall greatly enjoy."

"But do you really need me? Could you not get along without me?" Constance asked as she searched his face with her earnest eyes.

"No, indeed, I cannot go without you. I have de-

pended upon you too long to be willing to take up the drudgery of copying again," he said, decidedly. "If you feel that you cannot go or would prefer not to, why, then, I will throw up the whole thing, and some one else will have to write up the important cities which have been assigned to me," he concluded, with an air that seemed to say if she refused his request that would settle the matter for him also.

"Of course I shall go if you put it that way," Constance said, smiling through her tears and trying hard to keep back the sob that arose in her throat; "and, truly, I have long been homesick for a look at dear old New York. Still"—a little smile quivering about the corners of her mouth—"I am half inclined to think there is a plot about it somewhere. How kind you have always been to me, Professor Gardiner."

"Tut! tut! What a faithful, conscientious little amanuensis I have had for more than two years! One can pay for mere mechanical labor what it is worth; but it is not so easy to put a proper estimate upon hearty interest and sympathy such as you have always shown in my service. But about our trip," he added in a lighter tone. "Can you be ready to start a week from to-day?"

"Yes, whenever it suits your convenience," she replied.

"That's clever. Now regarding our party. I suppose you feel some interest to know who are to be our traveling companions?"

Constance had not paid much heed to his remark about going with a party. It had occurred to her that

perhaps it might be composed of some other scientific gentlemen and their wives.

She looked up now, however, with some curiosity, while a flush arose to her cheek, for she shrunk from meeting any of her old-time fashionable friends.

The professor's eyes twinkled with amusement, for he read her thought.

"I'm afraid you'll think I am getting to be a gay cavalier in my old age when I tell you that I am to accompany three ladies besides yourself across the continent," he said, jocosely. "Mrs. Noble, with her mother, Mrs. Walker, and her aunt, Mrs. Damon."

"Mrs. Noble!" Constance cried in a tone of delight. "That will be perfectly charming, for Fannie Noble—Noble Fannie the schoolgirls used to call her—and I have been dear friends for years," and from that moment she looked forward to the trip with the greatest eagerness.

Professor Gardiner did not think it wise to say anything about Laurence being one of the party also, for she had already been so shrewd in her surmise he feared she might suspect his complicity in the matter.

He dropped the young man a line to this effect and announcing his success in winning Constance's consent to make one of the party going East.

A day or two later, however, she learned the fact, apparently by accident.

The professor had asked her to go out with him and give him the benefit of her judgment in making a few necessary purchases in view of their journey, and while

going from one store to another they met Laurence on the street.

He bade them good morning, shook hands with them, and appeared as if about to hasten on, when Professor Gardiner remarked, with a sly wink:

"What's your hurry, Everet? It is too warm a day to be flying about in that style."

"That is true, but I am in a hurry. I have had a business call to New York and have but little time to prepare for it," Laurence replied, instantly taking his cue.

"Well! well! Isn't that a coincidence now?" said the elder gentleman, with a musing air. "When are you going?"

"Can you put it off till the first day of next week for the sake of having agreeable company?" the professor inquired, and then proceeded to explain his own and Constance's plans in connection with the Nobles.

"I am sure no one could resist such a temptation," Laurence remarked, as he searched Constance's face, which had flushed with pleasure at the professor's invitation, "and if it will be agreeable to all concerned I will gladly make one of the party. Now you must excuse me, as I have a pressing engagement," he added, and with a bow and a smile he was gone.

Thus the affair had the appearance of being arranged in the most natural manner, and Constance had no suspicion that her old friend had planned it from beginning to end.

The first of the following week six happy people left San Francisco *en route* for the East.

It proved to be an ideal trip, for no one appeared to be in a hurry, in spite of Laurence's "business call to New York," and every point of especial interest along the way was visited and thoroughly appreciated.

The professor made notes now and then on some of the more important cities, and gave them to Constance to copy and enlarge upon; but she soon began to think that his commission from the publishers of the "new encyclopedia" could not be a remarkably important one, since the articles which she had to prepare were few and far between and also quite brief.

The party was away two months, August and September, and all were enthusiastic in their enjoyment of the various places they visited.

Constance resolutely put away all care and anxiety, for she knew that no amount of fretting would do any good or end her suspense one whit the sooner; while she felt that she would appear extremely ungrateful to her kind old friend and also throw a damper upon the pleasure of the others if they suspected she was grieving.

So she wisely determined to make the most of her holiday, and thus be better prepared to take up her work again upon her return to San Francisco.

They arrived in that city on the 5th of October, Laurence having remained in New York during the second and third weeks of September to transact business, in order that he might be able to return with his friends.

Constance had gained in flesh and color, was bright and animated, and the professor declared that she was

"as fresh as a girl in her teens," while he believed that he had added ten years to his life by taking the much-needed rest.

A great surprise awaited Constance, however, when she reached her boarding place on the evening of her return.

It was nothing less than another letter from her husband, telling her that at last, after long months of agonizing suspense, almost amounting to despair, he had received her letters to him.

He would explain, he wrote, what had caused them to miss him when he saw her, which he hoped would be soon.

He had been ill, he said. He was convinced that the climate of Australia did not agree with him, and if some arrangement could be made with his former employers, so that he need not fear the rigor of the law, he would like to come back to her and begin life anew.

He felt that he could not live apart from his wife and child any longer; he was even willing to brave the cold shoulder of his former friends for the sake of once more having a home with them.

He begged her to write to him immediately, sending her letter to the care of a party who was living in an obscure portion of San Francisco, giving the name, street, and number, through whom it would reach him safely and without fear of his proximity being discovered.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN OF THE WANDERER.

This letter, which had been written only three days before, greatly excited Constance, for it told her that her husband had already returned to this country and was living in concealment in San Francisco, only waiting until he could be assured of personal safety before coming to her.

This startling piece of news threw a sudden weight of care and responsibility upon her that blotted all the brightness from her face and cast a blight upon her spirits, making her seem very different from the blooming, happy woman she had been when she stepped from the train two hours previous upon her return from her delightful holiday.

Noel had written that if his safety could be guaranteed he would come back to her.

This would involve the necessity of an interview with Ames & Worthing, to make some arrangement to this end.

She did not doubt that they would readily grant her request, for they had always been most kind to her; but her sensitive spirit shrunk from the ordeal of going to them upon such an errand.

Oh, she thought, if Noel himself could only have

written them a manly, straightforward letter asking this and promising to do his best to repay the money he had taken from them, it would have made everything so much easier for her and been so much more to his credit than to have depended upon her, a delicate woman, to make these arrangements for him.

Still, he was her husband—he had returned to her. She had given him her word that she would do everything in her power to help him, and she would keep her promise.

She would also have to make a home for him somewhere, and this would necessitate the giving up of her work with the professor—the work which she had grown to enjoy so much and which had given her such a sense of independence; while too, the companionship of her dear old friend, who was so congenial, who had always been so kind and fatherly, would be something that she would sadly miss.

But she felt that her own personal feelings must not be considered now. The salvation of her husband was of far more consequence, and she was willing to sacrifice every other consideration to secure this end.

She thought all this out after reading Noel's letter, then arose to answer it immediately and assure him that she would see Ames & Worthing as soon as possible in his behalf, and then communicate the result to him.

But just as she had seated herself at her writing desk Laurence came in to tell her that her trunk, which for some reason could not be found upon their arrival,

had come to light and would soon be delivered to her by an expressman.

"But what is the matter? Did you find Alice ill?" he asked, instantly noticing the change in her.

When he bade her good-by after putting her into the carriage that was to take her home, he thought how like she was to the bright, beautiful Constance she had been before her marriage, and he hoped, as the years went on, she might know much of real, true happiness, even though she might never be free.

But now she seemed to have grown years older. All the brightness and animation had gone out of her face; there was a look of care and anxiety on her brow, an expression of pain about her mouth.

"No. Alice is well, but——" Constance began, then stopped short, while a flush of deepest crimson dyed her face.

She could not bear to confess her trouble, for she felt ashamed to have any one know how weak her husband had shown himself in thus depending upon her to smooth all obstacles from his path.

Then, after a moment, her long-tried heart yearning for sympathy and counsel, she resolved to confide in her old friend.

"Read this," she said, putting Noel's letter into his hands, "and advise me what to do."

Then she turned abruptly from him and busied herself with her writing while he read it.

A frown settled upon Laurence Everet's brow as he perused the weak, appealing epistle which threw so much of a burden upon the deserted, long-neglected

wife, and his lips curled involuntarily at the lack of manliness in it.

Oh, how he longed to spirit Constance away beyond the reach of all further care and trouble, for he could foresee only future misery for her, judging from the past and present indications.

More than this, the knowledge of Noel Southworth's return had come upon him with the force of a terrible blow.

Although, to a great extent, he had given up the thought of winning Constance for his wife, he had somehow grown to feel that in some degree she belonged to him, for it had become natural to him to plan for her, to shield her from many of the ills and disagreeable things of life, and to advise her upon all perplexing and momentous questions.

But now, he thought, with a feeling of keen pain, he would have no right to exercise any of these privileges. He would not be able to visit her as freely as heretofore, without perhaps awakening Noel's suspicions regarding the nature of his feelings toward her, and, as a natural consequence, his jealousy and dislike.

These thoughts made him sad and miserable, and he repressed a heavy sigh as he refolded the letter, returned it to the envelope and passed it back to Constance.

"Well?" she questioned, appealingly.

"Of course, Constance, I can only advise you to do as your own heart and conscience dictate," he answered, gravely. "It seems that he has come back

expecting to be reinstated in your affection and confidence and to have the past blotted out."

"Yes—and I must do the best for him that I can," she returned, with downcast eyes.

Somehow she could not meet Laurence's grave earnest glance without a keen sense of pain.

"Do you imagine there will be any difficulty in arranging with Ames & Worthing?" she asked, after a moment.

"Not the slightest," Laurence responded in a tone of positive assurance, "and I will arrange the matter for you, Constance, if you will trust me to do so."

"If I will trust you! Oh, Laurence, but for your goodness to me, but for my trust in you, I should have sunk long since under the burden I have had to bear," she cried, tremulously, and almost losing courage in view of the outlook before her.

"Then let me go immediately to Mr. Worthing and lay the case before him," Laurence said, eagerly. "I have no doubt that he and his partner will be glad, for your sake, to waive all proceedings against Mr. Southworth. Then, the matter once settled, he can come to you without further delay, and I am sure the sooner it is arranged the more comfortable you will feel."

"You are very kind, Laurence, and it will be a great relief if you will attend to it," Constance responded, gratefully. "Still," with a weary sigh which touched her companion deeply, "I feel as if I am shirking a very unpleasant duty upon your shoulders."

"Pray do not think that," he answered, earnestly. "I do not mind going to Worthing at all, for he is one

of the best-hearted fellows in the world. And I'll be about it at once, for I long to see that anxious cloud lifted from your brow."

He arose as he spoke, and promising to see her early in the morning, he went away.

Constance's fortitude gave way the moment she was alone, and she burst into passionate weeping, and then she asked herself why she wept—why she was so strangely oppressed, when she ought to be happy over the return of her husband and the prospect of a speedy reunion with him?

She told herself that she was glad he had come back; it had long been her wish; and now, if he would conduct himself in a manly fashion, face his responsibilities, pay his debts and live down the reproach which he had brought upon himself, she would give thanks and rejoice, and help him to rise in the world by every effort in her power.

Laurence, although weary from his journey, proceeded directly to the house of Mr. Worthing, whom he was fortunate in finding at home, and his partner, Mr. Ames, with him.

He had a long talk with them regarding Noel Southworth's return, and found them very kindly disposed and willing, for the sake of his noble wife, to do what they could toward helping him to start anew in life.

They consented to waive all proceedings against him, take his note for the amount yet due them, and allow him six years in which to pay it.

Laurence thought this was very kind of them, and

having concluded these arrangements, he took his leave, and on his way home called upon Professor Gardner, to break the news to him and consult with him regarding some employment for the returned wanderer; for he thought the kindest thing that could be done for him would be to set him at once at work.

The professor was very much upset by the information.

"And now I shall have to lose my incomparable little amanuensis!" he exclaimed in a tone of dismay, "for of course if the man has come back he will expect to take care of his family, and I am afraid I shall never find any one who will show such an interest in my work as that dear, conscientious woman. How does she appear to feel, Everet, in view of this unexpected *denouement*?" he concluded, with some anxiety.

"As usual, she puts herself entirely out of sight; her thought is all for him; to save him all unpleasantness and to make his return as smooth and comfortable as possible," Laurence responded, with a jar of impatience in his tone.

"Humph! that is always the way with these self-sacrificing women," said the professor in the same strain. "If there is anything disagreeable to be done they think it is their duty to do it; that they must smooth every rough place, pluck every thorn from the pathway of their lords and masters, until the selfish creatures grow to expect it as their right; when, if they were made to feel their own responsibilities a little more, it would be better for them and vastly better for the poor little wives who make such slaves of

themselves. Well," he concluded, somewhat sharply, "I suppose we must find something for the man to do. Of course Ames & Worthing will not feel like taking him back again."

"No. People would lose confidence in them if they knew of their employing any one who had once been dishonest," Laurence gravely returned; "but I was going to suggest that you give him Mrs. Southworth's place until we can find something better for him."

"That is a good idea," his companion responded, "for it will give him immediate employment, which will be good for him for a number of reasons. Then, too, Mrs. Southworth would be a help to him, as she could tell him better than any one else just what will be required of him; while in case anything should happen to him again the place would still be open to her."

It was evident that the professor did not have quite as much faith in Noel Southworth as that gentleman might require.

Thus it was arranged that if he would accept the position he might step into his wife's place as soon as he chose, and at an early hour the next morning Laurence went to make his report to Constance.

She was very grateful to him—very grateful to Ames & Worthing, while tears sprung in her eyes upon learning of Professor Gardiner's kindness and interest in offering to take her truant husband into his office.

The next thing was to plan how best to bring about Noel's reunion with his family, and this, to Laurence, was the hardest task of all.

"Write your letter, Constance," he said, with as

much composure as he could command, "and I will take it at once to the address he has given you. It will take less time than to send it by mail, and he is probably waiting very anxiously for it. Then I will bring him directly here to you. He will not feel quite so lonely and forsaken if he has some one to accompany him across the city."

"Laurence, how thoughtful you are!" Constance huskily exclaimed, and amazed that he could so far forget himself in his devotion to her.

A slightly bitter smile curled his lips, and he was very pale, but for the world he would not have had her know anything of the wild despair that was raging in his heart; how utterly wretched he was in view of this reunion of the long-parted husband and wife; how cruelly his own fond hopes, which had begun to bud again, had been crushed and slain by his return!

"I am only doing what your brother Reginald would do for you if he were here," he said as he stooped to pick up a pin from the floor to conceal the spasm of pain he could not control. Then he added: "Now write your letter while I amuse Alice, and Mr. Southworth shall have it at as early an hour as I can get it to him."

Constance mechanically turned to her writing desk, while the young man took her little one upon his knee and read a fairy story to her in a low tone until the letter was finished.

She could not write very much, for her heart was too full of conflicting emotions; but she told him all that was necessary to make him feel that he could

come immediately to her with perfect freedom, and having sealed and addressed her letter, she brought and gave it into Laurence's hands without a word.

He took it as silently, gave her hand one lingering clasp, and abruptly left the room, feeling almost as if she was about to die and be laid away from his sight forever.

Noel Southworth had given Constance an alias to use in addressing his letter, as he wished no one to suspect that he was in the city until he could be assured of personal safety, and thus, upon arriving at the place designated, Laurence inquired for him by this name.

He had seen him only once since the day of his marriage, when, with such conscious pride, he had led from the altar the fair girl whom he had made his wife, feeling so secure in his happiness—so confident that his future was to be one of unclouded prosperity and enjoyment.

Laurence remembered how handsome he had looked—then how tastefully he had been dressed—in the richest of material and in the height of style.

But, alas! what a change!

When he entered the room where Laurence sat waiting for him he could scarcely believe that he was the same man.

He succeeded in concealing his surprise, however, greeted him with what cordiality he could assume, and announced that he was the bearer of a letter from his wife.

The man had flushed to his brows upon meeting Laurence, but he seized his letter with an eagerness

that betrayed he had experienced considerable anxiety because he had not heard from Constance earlier.

Excusing himself, he tore it open and rapidly devoured its contents, heaving a sigh of intense relief as he finished it and realized how true his noble-hearted wife had been to him.

"It was kind of you to bring me this, instead of making me wait to get it through the mail," he remarked, turning an appreciative glance upon Laurence. "And now will you please take me to her at once?"

"Certainly," his companion replied. "I have a carriage waiting at the door, and in less than an hour you shall be in Mrs. Southworth's presence."

He led the way out to it, waited for Noel to enter, then followed, and in another moment they were rolling toward the humble habitation where Constance had lived almost ever since her husband's desertion.

But little was said by either during the drive.

Noel was overcome and excited in view of the approaching reunion with his wife and child, and kept glancing anxiously from the carriage windows, as if impatient of the distance which separated them; while, too, he did not seem to be exactly at ease in Laurence's presence.

As for Laurence himself, while he most earnestly wished to further whatever would contribute most toward the happiness of the woman who he loved better than life, it seemed as if all that was most bright and attractive in the world was fast slipping out of his grasp, and he could not talk. It was like losing Constance over again, for although he had relinquished the

idea of making her his wife after their confidential conversation upon the subject of divorce, he had somehow grown to feel that she, in a measure, belonged to him and would always rely upon him to a certain extent.

Of course he knew that he could no longer continue to visit her as he had been in the habit of doing—that all their drives and pleasant little outings would have to be discontinued.

She would no longer appeal to him in times of perplexity or doubt, or seek his advice upon matters of business or, as she sometimes did, regarding questions relating to Alice. Her husband would hereafter be her only confidant, and he would be able to see her only occasionally, and then with a certain formality that would be exceedingly irksome after the pleasant freedom and friendliness of the past.

But a feeling of doubt and anxiety swept over him as he gazed into the changed face opposite him, and wondered if Constance would find in the returned wanderer the sympathy and companionship she craved and so much needed—wondered if her heart could ever fully return to its allegiance to him—if she would be happy living with Noel again.

The carriage drew up at last before the house of Mrs. Knowles, on Geary Street, and both men experienced a sense of relief that the long and awkward drive was over.

Laurence led the way upstairs to Constance's room, tapped lightly, then opened the door and held it thus until Noel Southworth entered; then closing it softly,

he went, with a white face and unsteady steps, back to the carriage, re-entered it and gave the order to be driven to his hotel.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONSTANCE'S TRIALS THICKEN.

When the door opened to admit her husband, Constance started from the low chair where she had been sitting with Alice on her lap, reading fairy stories to her and trying thus to kill time while she waited for the coming of Noel.

She put her little one upon the floor and turned her pale, expectant face toward the man who stood waiting for her greeting.

"Constance!"

"Noel!"

She went to him with both hands extended, and, opening his arms, he folded her to him with a low, passionate exclamation of thankfulness.

Constance was trembling so from excitement that she could scarcely stand, while she could hardly believe in the reality of the meeting.

She had dreamed of it a hundred times and wakened only to find it a vision, and it almost seemed as if she must be dreaming now.

Noel was no less excited.

He called her by the old endearing names he had been wont to use, breathing fond words of love, telling her what a brave, faithful, patient little wife she had been, while he reproached himself in no measured terms for his own shortcomings and unworthiness.

Presently he seated her in a chair, for he saw that she was greatly overcome, and turned to greet his child. But she, of course, did not know him, and ran crying to her mother, saying she "did not want the man to take her."

Constance tried to calm her and explained that it was "papa come back to them;" but it was some little time before she could persuade her to go to him.

At last, however, by means of sweetmeats and some curious things that he had in his pockets, he coaxed her into his lap, and Constance then had an opportunity to observe him and realize the changes which his long absence had made in him.

Somehow he did not seem like the Noel who had left her more than three years ago. He did not look the same, he did not act the same, even his voice did not sound the same, and Constance was conscious of an inward shock—a strange heart sinking as she sat there and silently studied him.

Yes, he was sadly changed.

When he went away he had been an erect, finely-formed man, with handsome features and a clear, bright eye, while in the matter of dress he had always been a model of neatness and good taste.

But he had grown very stout, and he no longer carried his head with the proud poise of other days. His face was bronzed by exposure and flushed by the free use of liquor, the scent of which Constance had caught while folded in his embrace. His hair, which he had always been particular to keep closely cropped in the latest style, evidently had not been cut for a long time

and looked coarse and neglected. His clothing was of cheap material and ill fitting, his shoes were worn and unpolished.

Could it be possible that this was Noel Southworth, the former brilliant man of the world, the pet of society, the drawing-room exquisite?

Constance found it hard to be reconciled to the change, yet she bravely told herself that the outward appearance did not matter much if he was but true and noble in heart and purpose.

Yet as she listened to his conversation with Alice and noticed that his voice had grown as coarse and harsh as his appearance, that his laugh was loud and his language embellished, now and then, with slangy expressions, she could not fail to realize that he had sadly deteriorated from the refined and cultivated gentleman whom she believed she had married.

Still he was her husband, the man to whom she had promised to cling for better or for worse, and even while she was saddened and depressed by these evidences of degeneracy and the unmistakable marks of dissipation also, she was as firmly determined as ever to do the best she could for him in the future and trust the rest to God.

Alice, having once recovered from her fear, soon made friends with him, and ere long was addressing him as "papa" as glibly and naturally as if he had never been away from her, while Noel appeared to be perfectly delighted with her, and Constance hoped that the child, whom she had trained with the utmost care, might exercise a refining influence upon her father and

gradually lead him to be careful, for her sake, in both appearance and manner.

We must now go back to the time when Noel, after his terrible disappointment in not receiving the message he expected from Constance, lost heart, returned to his old habit of drinking, and was discharged from the firm with which he was associated.

It will be remembered that he bought out a sheep farmer and went back into the country for nearly a hundred miles.

The change proved to be temporarily very beneficial to him. The active outdoor life was healthful and invigorating, he was away from many of his former temptations, and as his flocks and his farm were in good condition, he became interested in them and his new occupations and for a time everything moved along prosperously.

But the mistakes of his early training could never be corrected at this late day of his life.

He had been in the habit of having every rough place made smooth from his early childhood, and he had neither the strength of character nor the inclination to bravely attack and overcome the difficulties which now came in his way.

So gradually the enthusiasm which he had at first experienced in his country life diminished, the novelty of his sheep farm wore off, he dropped into indolent habits, neglecting work which ought to have been promptly attended to and leaving the care of his flocks to incompetent help.

Of course it was not long before both farm and herd began to show the effects of this.

Many of his sheep sickened and died, while the wool which he did produce, being of inferior quality, did not bring remunerative prices.

This so discouraged him that he resumed his habits of dissipation, and so went on from bad to worse until he was on the verge of ruin again.

Just about this time he went down to Sydney with a load of wool, although he did not make the trip in the best of spirits, for he knew that his merchandise was poor and would not be likely to find a very ready market.

He succeeded in disposing of it, however, and was on the point of starting back to his farm, when, as he was threading his way along the docks, he espied the steamer by which he had, months before, expected to receive letters from Constance, lying at her pier.

Obedying a sudden impulse, he immediately boarded her and sought the captain.

"Have you any letters for a man named Noel Southworth?" he inquired, his florid face paling to a sickly hue with mingled hope and the fear of disappointment.

"Of course I have, and have had for many months," the officer replied as he keenly searched the man's eager face. "I have often wondered many a time why the package was never called for. Can you tell me anything about this Noel Southworth?"

"I am Noel Southworth. Oh, give me the letters," he cried, greatly excited.

The captain, being a kind-hearted person, pitied the

man, who, he saw, was suffering keenly, and without a word went to his safe and brought the package which had been intrusted to his care so long ago.

Noel seized it greedily.

"You say they were never called for?" he said, hoarsely. "I sent a man to get them—I charged him not to miss the steamer."

"I am sorry, sir, but no one ever came to inquire for them," the captain responded in a friendly tone. "I regretted being obliged to carry them back and forth so many times, for I was told that they were important; but not knowing your address in Sydney, I could not mail the package to you, and so could only take the best possible care of it in the hope that it would some day be called for."

Then it flashed upon Noel that the clerk in the store had lied to him; that he had neglected to attend to his commission and then tried to cover the fact with a falsehood.

He thanked the captain for his faithfulness to his trust, then, heaping silent curses upon the head of the offending clerk, he stole away to a secluded place where he would not be observed, tore open the package and devoured the precious letters which his faithful wife had penned, day by day, in the hope that some time he might know and appreciate how true she had been to him, and thus be won back to her and to a noble life again.

He shed many bitter tears over those blessed pages—tears that were drawn forth because of her goodness and fidelity; tears for his own weakness which

had led him astray and marred his life; tears of homesickness and of longing to go back to his own country—to his wife and child once more.

He would go, was the sudden resolve that electrified him. He would return to San Francisco on this very steamer.

He was convinced that he should never make a success of sheep farming or wool raising, for his property was already heavily mortgaged and he was otherwise deeply in debt.

He had the money—the proceeds of the wool just disposed of—in his pocket to pay his passage back to California. He would run the risk of making favorable terms with Ames & Worthing. He would begin life anew, find some position where he could support his family in comfort, and *live* once more.

And so, obeying the same selfish impulse which had always governed him, he took passage in the steamer, which was advertised to sail within a few days.

With the same indifference to all personal responsibility which he had exhibited when, more than two years previous, he had abandoned his post in San Francisco and deserted his wife and child, he now turned over his farm into the hands of a broker, to be disposed of according to his best judgment, and his debts to be canceled as best they might with the proceeds. He then threw off all care, all thought of everything but the longing to get home, and was soon sailing over the broad ocean toward his native land.

Thus we find him back in his own country, not the truly repentant and manly man Constance had hoped

he would prove to be, but a weak and vacillating creature, who was depending upon his wife and "luck" to set him on his feet again and keep him there.

What wonder, then, that the young wife's long-tried heart sunk as she realized this?

What wonder that at times she would mentally compare him with Laurence Everet, her faithful, helpful friend, who, though he possessed abundance of this world's goods, was never idle, but always on the alert to make the most of every opportunity, while he was ever ready to lend a helping hand to others who were less fortunate than himself?

The day following Noel's return Professor Gardiner called upon the young couple and laid before them the proposition which he and Laurence had discussed regarding Noel filling Constance's position until something better should offer.

He did not appear to be very much elated at the prospect, but remarked, with a somewhat injured, almost sullen, air, that he would take it for the present.

A week later found them settled in a small but cozy house, comfortably furnished, and made as attractive as possible by the taste and ingenuity of Constance; and now began the life from which she had hoped and prayed that such good results might proceed.

At first all went well. Noel was prompt and faithful in his business, prompt also to return to his home after the labors of the day were over, while he appeared to really appreciate the efforts of his wife to contribute to his happiness and seemed happy and contented.

Gradually the bronze tint wore off his face; he be-

came more careful about his personal appearance, while he tried—at least when in Constance's presence—to tone down his rough manners somewhat, and thus seemed more like his former self.

This was, of course, encouraging; but the faithful wife was quick to detect the fact that he often drank more than was good for him, and this made her very anxious.

She gently chided him for indulging the habit, and at first he confessed his weakness and promised to renounce it; but he did not, and after a time grew irritable and impatient under reproof.

Occasionally there were days when he would be unnerved and his hand unsteady after indulging too freely, so that he could not go to his work; and Constance, to fill the gap, would present herself at her old post in Professor Gardiner's office, patiently labor the whole day through, then go home to wait upon her husband and prepare some dainty to tempt his vitiated appetite.

She never complained, though her heart was often heavy. She was always sweet and gentle, striving to win, rather than drive, the man to a better way of living; but, alas! at what a costly sacrifice, for already the tax upon her strength and spirits was showing itself in her pale, sad face and languid step.

Seeing this, Professor Gardiner, out of his generous and sympathetic heart, raised Noel's salary, hoping thus to arouse his ambition and make him realize his responsibilities to a greater extent.

This did seem to encourage him for a time, and he was more faithful in his duties; but instead of trying

to save this additional amount toward the liquidation of his debt to Ames & Worthing, as Constance repeatedly urged him to do, he lapsed at once into some of his old extravagances, and the money slipped through his fingers like water.

One evening Constance arranged a little surprise for him by inviting some pleasant people, who had been their faithful friends throughout their troubles, to join them at dinner and spend the evening in playing whist, a game of which Noel was very fond and an expert.

She had taken great pains to make her home look attractive and her table inviting, and felt so sure that Noel would be delighted and entertained that she was wholly unprepared for the disappointment awaiting her.

He failed to come to dinner at the usual hour, something that had not occurred before since his return, and the company were obliged to sit down without him.

Constance tried to excuse his absence by saying that Professor Gardiner might have been obliged to keep him for extra work, and she blamed herself for not having guarded against such *contrctemps* by giving him a hint of her plans when he went out that morning.

An hour, two hours passed, and still he was absent.

Constance began to be heartsick and to fear that he might appear at any moment under the influence of liquor, and thus shame her before her friends.

She was thankful when at last the company, out of sympathy for her anxiety, finally took their departure, leaving her alone with her suspense and misery.

'Still Noel did not come, and the long night wore on.

There was no sleep for poor Constance, for her heart was heavy with forebodings, and when morning at last broke, she was white and haggard and nearly worn out with her sleepless vigil.

At an early hour she presented herself in Professor Gardiner's office and inquired for her husband.

"What! hasn't Mr. Southworth been home all night?" he inquired in a startled tone.

"No. I have not seen him since he returned to the office yesterday afternoon," Constance told him in a weary tone that went to his heart.

"But he left here at the usual hour last evening," said her friend. "He had appeared a trifle grave during the day, but I imagined that he might not be feeling quite well. My dear child," he added tenderly, "you look thin and worn—you have been losing your strength and courage of late. Tell your old friend all that troubles you, and let me help you if I can."

This kindly sympathy was too much for the composure of the long-suffering wife, and breaking down utterly, she laid her heart bare to him, confessing her fear that her husband would never be himself again and that he might have deserted her a second time.

The professor said what he could to encourage her, but he also feared that Noel, having once sunk so low in the social and moral scale, would never amount to much as a man. His character was naturally weak, and he lacked strength of purpose to conquer the evil tendencies which were dragging him downward.

Constance offered to remain and do her husband's

work for that day, but her friend would not allow her to do so, for he saw that she was not equal to the task; so he told her to go home and try to rest and not worry, while he would search for Noel.

But he could not be found that day, and though she was nearly wild from anxiety, Constance insisted upon returning to her post in the office the next morning.

On Sunday morning, just ten days after his disappearance, Noel presented himself at his own door.

He was pale, haggard, and tremulous, his linen soiled, his hair uncombed, his clothing unbrushed, his eyes bloodshot; his whole appearance, in fact, betraying but too plainly the season of debauch to which he had abandoned himself.

Constance's heart sunk within her, and for the first time a feeling of disgust and aversion took possession of her.

When he had bathed, changed his clothing, and was rested, she had a long and serious talk with him, telling him that she would cheerfully devote herself to him if he would try to be a man; that she was willing to share poverty with him, and even to work with him for their mutual support; but in return he owed it to her to conduct himself in a way that would not disgrace her and command her respect if not her love.

He admitted that he had behaved shamefully and promised to do better; only, he complained, he could not sit all day long in a close office, like a woman, engaged in the monotonous occupation of copying. He must have some more stirring and man-like business.

Constance consulted with the professor regarding

this, and he and Laurence both concluded that it would be best for him to have a change.

A little later a position was secured for him where he could have some exercise in the open air, while Constance, putting a kind and trustworthy woman into her home as housekeeper, went back to her work as amanuensis for the professor.

Three months passed, and Noel appeared to be doing well in his new place, when he suddenly vanished again and did not return for many weeks.

Constance bore it as she had always borne everything, patiently and sweetly, but it wore upon her sadly, and Noel was gone so long this time that she began to fear that he never would come back again, but one morning he returned as suddenly as he had gone.

Again the much-tried wife endeavored to uplift and encourage him. His employers were persuaded to receive him back, and he seemed determined to make amends for the past, while hope budded again in the heart of the gentle Constance.

But one dreary winter's day, when she went home weary and spent from her work and chilled with a long and lonely walk in the rain and mud, she waited in vain for her husband to come to dinner; and as the evening dragged heavily by until the clock struck ten, she knew that Noel would not come at all—that he had disappeared as before.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END OF A COWARD.

Constance felt that were it not for her child she would gladly give up the struggle to live, lay down all her burdens, and die.

It seemed as if she had borne all that it was possible for her to bear, and yet she tried not to murmur at this fresh trial, for she believed in God and knew that He would not try her beyond her strength.

She still kept on with her work, for she knew that she must work—that she could not henceforth depend upon her husband for support if he continued to be as erratic in his movements as during the past few months.

Five weary days passed thus.

On the morning of the sixth, while she was busily copying the preface to a book which Professor Gardiner had just completed, some one entered the outer office, conversed in subdued tones with her friend for a few moments, and then went out again.

Presently the professor came into the room where she was sitting, and Constance noticed that there was a folded paper in his hand.

She glanced up into his face, for she thought his manner was a little strange, and saw there an expres-

sion that sent a violent shock through her, making her heart almost cease its beating.

"Was that Noel who came in just now?" she questioned, breathlessly.

"No, my child, that was Mr. Everet, and——"

"Did he bring any news of my husband?" Constance cried, something in the professor's tone and the tender inflection of his "my child" instinctively warning her of evil tidings.

"Yes," her friend replied, with evident reluctance.

"What is it?" the young wife demanded, starting to her feet. "Something has happened to him. Tell me!"

"Sit down, my dear," said her friend, kindly, "and brace yourself, if you can, for sad news."

He gently forced her back into her chair and then continued:

"You have been a very brave woman, Constance, throughout your trials, but an added blow has fallen upon you. Your husband is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the startled wife in a frightened whisper, while she gazed at her companion with a wondering look, as if she had not fully comprehended the import of the word.

She had borne so much already she did not appear to feel the blow as keenly as he had expected, or else it had benumbed her beyond the power to give expression to excessive grief.

The professor merely bowed assent to the fact. He wished her to comprehend it more fully and gain some-

thing of composure before he revealed to her the harrowing details of the event.

"When? how?" she questioned under her breath, her great pathetic eyes searching his face with an expression of horror in them that made his heart bleed for her.

Without speaking, he put the paper he held into her hands.

"This will tell you," he simply said.

Mechanically she unfolded it.

It was a telegram, dated the previous evening from a certain hotel at Los Angeles, and contained just six words:

"Noel Southworth committed suicide here to-day."

Constance made no sound or movement as she read the dreadful sentence.

She seemed to be beyond giving expression to any feeling, and sat staring blankly at those fatal words as if fascinated by them, her face as colorless as the spotless band of linen about her neck, while her lips were drawn and livid from the sluggish beating of her heart.

Professor Gardner could have wept as he looked upon this beautiful woman so stricken by these fearful tidings; but it was a case beyond the power of human comfort, and partly through fear that she might lose consciousness, partly to conceal his own emotion, he went to a closet, poured out a glass of wine, and brought it to her.

"Drink it," he said, huskily.

"I cannot," she returned, waving it away with a gesture of loathing; then, lifting her despairing eyes to him, she asked in a tone of agony: "What shall I do?"

The man wondered at her.

There was not a tear, not a sob; but she seemed to have been stricken or congealed into an icy calm that was tenfold more frightful than the wildest grief would have been, her strained, agonized tones alone betraying what she mentally suffered.

He drew a chair beside her and sat down.

"You can do nothing, my child," he gently replied. "Just try to be calm and everything shall be done for you. Our friend Mr. Everet is already on his way to Los Angeles, and he will do all that is necessary—all, I am sure, that you could wish."

"Laurence!" Constance exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes. He went to your house this morning to leave something for your little one and met the messenger boy just coming away with this telegram, and he signed for it, saying he would bring it to you. But the boy told him that the message required an answer, as it was a question of death. Mr. Everet assured him that he had authority in the matter and would attend to it. He came directly here, told me what he had learned and what he feared, and we both felt justified in opening the telegram to ascertain its nature, and thus perhaps break the force of a great shock to you. Then Laurence induced me to tell you and started immediately for Los Angeles. He left word that you are to feel no care, no anxiety—that he will attend to

everything and return with Mr. Southwerth's body with all possible speed. And now, my poor child," he concluded, rising, "I am going to close the office and take you home, for you need rest and quiet."

He secured her hat and wraps and she put them on mechanically, still outwardly calm, but with a far-away look and manner which told that her thoughts were with that silent form lying so still and cold in that distant city.

Professor Gardiner called a carriage and went home with her, going into the house and helping her remove her things with all the tenderness and consideration of a father for a dearly-loved daughter.

He then made her lie down upon the couch in her pretty sitting-room, after which he sought the house-keeper and explained matters to her.

When he returned to Constance he asked:

"Now, my child, what more can I do you you? Shall I bring Mrs. Noble, or some other friend to you, or would you prefer to be alone—or shall I remain with you?"

"Alone! alone!" she repeated in a hollow tone, while a shiver ran over her frame as the dreary words smote heavily upon her desolate heart. "Oh, no! Do not bring any one—I must fight my battle out by myself. Ah, my kind friend," she cried, starting up and clinging to his arm for a moment, "you are my best friend, but no one can help me now; it is better that I should face this awful thing alone."

He felt that it would be best, although he would not have spared himself if he could have offered the least

comfort to her; so clasping her hand in silent farewell he bent and touched his lips in reverent sympathy to her white forehead and then went softly from her presence.

We cannot dwell upon those next few days.

No one save Constance herself could understand what she suffered as, shut up within her own room, she faced this last and greatest trial of all—faced the fact that all her labor, all her self-denial in her efforts to save her husband, had apparently been for naught. She had braved everything, borne everything, with almost heroic patience, while she hoped and prayed and waited for him to turn from his downward course and become a better man.

Had it been all for naught? Eternity alone would reveal the truth.

When Laurence returned from his sad errand he found Constance strangely calm, but looking as if a terrible and blighting storm had swept over her, robbing her of much of her life and strength.

In a few brief, carefully-worded sentences he told her all there was to know.

Noel had appeared at a prominent hotel in Los Angeles one evening and ordered a room. He remained there several days, but indulged so freely in drink that at last he lost control of himself, and they were obliged to confine him to his room. Some one remained with him until he became more quiet and finally appeared as if he wished to sleep. They left him alone, but when they went to him again he was beyond all human aid, while an empty bottle lying beside him on

the bed told that the act had been premeditated before he came to the hotel. He never aroused from the heavy stupor in which they found him, and died quietly only a few hours later.

Constance did not speak once while Laurence was relating this sad story; she made no comments when he finished; she merely accepted the facts and bore the stroke with what fortitude she could.

She asked a few questions upon matters which she thought might need attention, but she found that everything necessary had already been done and all care removed from her shoulders.

"I must cable Reginald," she remarked when all was told and Laurence was about to leave to make some arrangements for the last sad rites over the erring man.

"Reginald already knows," Laurence responded. "I cabled him immediately upon learning the facts, and you will probably receive a message from him before the day is over."

And she did—a message which told her that her brother would sail by the next steamer and be with her as early as it would be possible to reach her.

Two days later it was all over, and Noel Southworth was laid away in a quiet spot in Lone Mountain Cemetery, and the places that had once known him would hereafter know him no more forever.

Laurence Everet and Professor Gardiner, with Mrs. Noble, were everything to Constance during this trying time; but, to the astonishment of them all, she preserved the same outward calm as she had displayed

at first, although her white, rigid face and mechanical manner betrayed that the shock had been no light one.

They were more astonished when, a few days later, she begged Professor Gardiner to allow her to resume her work.

"My dear child!" the man exclaimed, tears starting to his kind eyes, as he looked into her colorless face and heavy eyes, "you are not fit to work. Go back home and rest until your brother comes, and then I know he will care for you as no one else can."

"No! no!" Constance exclaimed, with more of excitement than she had yet betrayed since her husband's death. "I cannot rest. I cannot stay alone. Let me work. I must work or I shall go—mad!"

He realized then that it would be wiser to keep her employed, for beneath that apparent calm at which they had marveled, he saw there were depths of woe which no one could fathom.

He belived that he understood her better than any one else, for he had had a better opportunity to study her character, and while he feared that her health might be seriously affected if she was allowed or forced to nourish her grief in idleness, he also felt that it was not so much a hopeless sorrow over the loss of her husband as a keen sense of despair and remorse that she had failed in her wifely mission—failed to save the man for whom she had sacrificed so much, and was perhaps now reproaching herself for some imaginary neglect of duty.

So he yielded to her request, and she went back to

her work while she waited for the coming of her brother.

* * * * *

We left Reginald Alexander and his wife just after they they had removed from the quiet home where they had resided ever since their arrival in Paris to their more elegant residence in a fashionable quarter of the city.

Reginald had never been satisfied to have Marguerite live in such an humble way. It had galled him exceedingly to think that he had taken her from her beautiful home in New York only to bury her in a few small, simply furnished rooms in an obscure street, even though she herself had chosen to live so out of consideration for the change in his circumstances.

But now the change in his position would warrant a better style of living—in fact, it demanded it; therefore he furnished a fine house in an elegant and attractive manner, and insisted that Marguerite should have plenty of servants to keep it in proper order, without doing any menial work herself. He also felt called upon to mingle more in society, and thus his beautiful wife was introduced to the most cultivated circles of the French metropolis.

She immediately created quite a sensation and was everywhere much admired, for she was fitted to shine anywhere and Reginald was very proud of her.

She knew not a little about medicine and surgery herself, for, delighted at her husband's rapid advancement in the hospital, she had sought to understand something about what had gained him his position by

reading works which he studied, and not infrequently Reginald would come across her, while they were at some brilliant reception, talking most learnedly with some of his colleagues.

But during all this time, strange to say, they grew no nearer to each other; indeed, if anything, the breach seemed to widen.

While Reginald was always punctilious in his bearing toward her in public, he immediately resumed his cool reserve the moment they were by themselves.

Marguerite bore this a long time with great patience and sweetness, trying by every means she could invent to surprise some expression of regard from her husband which would give her an opportunity to confess her love for him.

But he was always on his guard, having vowed that he would never offend her in that way again, and at last, becoming disheartened, she told herself that it was of no use; and she might as well reconcile herself to a loveless life, and try to get what enjoyment she could in society and from the attentions she received, and let him see that others appreciated her if he did not.

Of course this did not tend to make matters better, for with such feelings her own manner became somewhat cool and constrained, which only served to confirm Reginald in his belief that she did not and never could love him.

Into the midst of this gay and unreal way of living came the startling news of Noel Southworth's terrible death.

Of course Constance had kept them posted regarding her husband's return and the life they had been living since, although she had always written hopefully and in a way to lead them to feel that her prospects were really brighter than she had ever expected they would be again; consequently they had no suspicion of the trials to which she was subjected until Laurence Everet's shocking message reached them.

It came like a thunderbolt upon Reginald just after his return from the hospital one day, and almost unmanned him by its sickening horror.

Almost his first thought when he began to come to himself was for Marguerite.

What would she say? How would she receive the news of her old lover's tragic death?

At first he thought he would not tell her. He knew that he must go to Constance—she must have some one on whom to rely in this hour of bitter affliction; but he thought he could tell Marguerite that business called him home.

Still, he argued, she must learn the truth some time, and it would probably affect her no more at one time than another; and thus, after regaining his self possession to a certain extent, he went in to lunch, resolving to break it to her immediately and as gently as possible.

He was not as composed as he imagined, for the moment that Marguerite's eye rested on his face she knew that something unusual had disturbed him.

"What is it, Reginald? Are you ill or in trouble of any kind?" she inquired, coming forward to his side.

He glanced at her in surprise, for he had no idea that she watched him so closely.

"I am not ill nor in any personal trouble; but I have had bad news from Constance to-day," he returned, observing her keenly, to catch her expression when he should tell her the worst.

"Constance! Oh, I hope that neither she nor Alice is ill," she responded, with some anxiety.

"No, they are well, but Noel Southworth is—dead."

"Dead!" breathed Marguerite, catching her breath slightly and losing a trifle of her color. Then she added in a tone of deep sympathy: "Why, it is very sudden. What will Constance do—poor, dear child? It does seem as if she has had more than her share of trouble."

Reginald was amazed. What could this wonderful change mean?

He had almost anticipated another fainting turn or some startled outbreak of feeling such as she had shown when he told her of Noel's defalcation and desertion of his wife, and now she had hardly given the man a thought.

The announcement of his death had startled and shocked her, as it naturally would any one who had known him; but no thought of self had been associated with him—her feeling and sympathies were all with Constance, the much-tried, long-suffering wife.

"She has, indeed," Reginald replied when he could command himself sufficiently to speak; "but, to tell the truth, I cannot help feeling a sense of relief that she is freed from one who has only been sapping her life

of late; for in spite of her cheerful letters I have doubted her being happy since his return to her, while this last blow must have nearly killed her. The man committed suicide."

"Suicide!" cried Marguerite, aghast. "What a fearful shock it must have been to her! But, truly, Reginald," she added, thoughtfully, "I am not so very much surprised, for at heart he was a selfish coward, weak and unprincipled, and I can easily imagine that if driven into a corner he might seek to escape in some such miserable way. Of what new infamy had he been guilty to drive him to that?"

"I do not know the particulars. I have only received a cable message as yet," Reginald responded in a mechanical tone, for he was dumbfounded at the way she had received his news.

Then, suddenly bending a searching glance upon her, he added:

"But, Marguerite, what can you mean to speak of him thus? I did not dream that you could judge him like that."

"No. In spite of my repeated assurances you have imagined that I still worshiped a shattered idol," she retorted, with curling lips, then added: "I know I behaved very foolishly at the time you told me of his defalcation, but I was very angry with you, if you remember, and it was that rather than what you told me regarding Noel Southworth's crime that overcome me; and besides," with a vivid blush, "I did not then know things which I now know."

"What things?" Reginald demanded, sharply, for

he had been watching her closely and a dim suspicion of the truth had begun to dawn upon him, and his sudden heartbound of joy that was so akin to pain had given an unintentional severity to his tone.

Marguerite had been upon the verge of confessing her love; had those two words only been uttered tenderly, winningly, the Rubicon would have been passed. As it was, however, his sternness effectually drove the confession from her lips, and proudly throwing up her head, she adroitly turned the subject.

"Well, I have had a secret from you, Reginald, for some time," she said, as if that were a matter of small moment.

"A secret?" he repeated, with a frown, for her tone jarred upon him.

"Yes. I met Noel Southworth here in Paris over a year ago," and then she gave him a brief account of that interview.

CHAPTER XX.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

Reginald listened astonished.

He had never dreamed of such a thing as Noel Southworth having been in Paris during their residence there.

"Why did you not tell me of this at the time, Marguerite?" he gravely asked when she had finished her recital.

"Because, for one thing, I did not want you to be troubled," she answered, flushing again. "I knew that no argument would ever induce Noel Southworth to do the right thing, if that doing went contrary to his own inclinations; besides, I feared, if you met, there might be trouble between you and something might happen to you," she concluded, with downcast eyes.

Her husband regarded her in perplexity.

She had surely changed greatly during the last year, and it was very evident to him that even if she could never learn to love him, every atom of the tender regard which she had once entertained for her old lover had been uprooted from her heart.

He was a little touched by her thoughtfulness for him—she had feared that he and his brother-in-law might quarrel if they met and he would be injured.

Still, perhaps that was only natural, after all. He was her only protector, and she would be left utterly alone in the world if he was taken from her.

He would not allow himself to build any false hopes upon her words; but after a moment of thoughtful silence he remarked, with a heavy sigh:

"Well, the man's power to do either good or ill is at an end now; but my poor sister needs comfort, and I shall go to her at once."

"You will go to America!" Marguerite exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes. I shall go on the next steamer from Liverpool."

"When does it sail?" the young wife asked, grow-

ing pale, for his use of the first person told her that he intended leaving her behind.

"On Saturday."

"And this is Wednesday. You will have to leave Paris——"

"To-night on the last express."

Marguerite sunk back in her chair feeling faint and dizzy. It was so sudden—so unexpected, this thought that her husband meant to leave her there in Paris while he took that long, long journey alone.

The announcement of Noel Southworth's death had not begun to unnerve her like this.

But she quickly recovered herself, for her mind was working very rapidly, while a resolute light began to burn in her eyes.

"Then you will have much to do and must have your lunch at once," she remarked, going directly to the table and preparing to serve him.

Reginald observed her curiously, a strange pang at his heart because she was taking his journey as a matter of course and because she had not expressed a single regret at the approaching separation, nor even mentioned a desire to accompany him.

Surely this was evidence sufficient to prove his chance of ever winning her love a hopeless one.

Both were so occupied with their own thoughts that the meal was eaten almost in silence; and when Reginald finally arose from the table his wife hardly seemed conscious of the fact until he spoke to her, asking if she would attend to the packing of his trunk,

as he would have all that he could do during the afternoon to get his business affairs in a state to leave.

"Certainly I will attend to the packing. I was thinking of that," she said, with a start, and rising also. "Do not give a thought to anything of the kind."

He went away then to the hospital, and Marguerite, calling Norah, held a long conference with her, after which they went upstairs together.

It was an hour beyond their usual time for dining when Reginald returned, looking weary and a trifle nervous; but he found the house cheerfully lighted and an appetizing meal awaiting him.

Marguerite, clad in a dark cloth dress, greeted him as quietly and unconcernedly as if nothing unusual was about to occur, and this caused something like a feeling of despair in her husband's heart. She had not even taken pains to dress for him, as was her custom.

Did she not care that he was going—that the ocean was soon to separate them? he asked himself. Had she become so engrossed in society that she would find plenty to amuse and entertain her during his absence, so that she would scarcely miss him?

These were very bitter thoughts, but he made no outward sign of his suffering; he was only a trifle more quiet and thoughtful than usual.

After dinner he said that he had some papers to look over and put in order before his departure, so if any one called he must not be disturbed; he could attend to nothing else that evening.

"Can I help you, Reginald?" Marguerite asked.

He thought a moment, then remarked:

"There are some bills that I intended to pay to-morrow; but as I of course cannot, I will ask you to attend to them, if you will be so kind."

"They are all settled," Marguerite quietly replied. "I found them on your desk after you went out this afternoon, and thinking you might be glad to have them off your mind, I wrote checks for the several amounts and mailed them in time for the four-o'clock collection."

"That was very thoughtful; thank you," he responded, heartily, but thinking it was very strange she should have done such a thing without first speaking to him about it.

Still he laid it to her desire to save him trouble and let it pass without further comment.

"Is there anything else that I can do?" she asked.

"I do not think of anything," he replied, and then hastened to the library, while Marguerite ran lightly upstairs, where she sat down at her desk and wrote rapidly for more than half an hour.

Then she rang for Norah, who since their removal to their new residence had been more of a confidential housekeeper than an ordinary servant, and with whom she now held another long conference; after which she gave her the sheets upon which she had been writing.

Reginald went upstairs about nine—the evening express left Paris about eleven—and was surprised to find not only his own trunk, but two others also, standing in the upper hall locked, strapped and ready for a journey.

"What does this mean?" he inquired of Norah, who was on her way downstairs to get something for her mistress. I shall take nothing but one trunk."

"Mrs. Alexander thought the others would be needed, sir," Norah respectfully replied as she went on her way, but he noticed that her eyes were red from weeping and wondered what had grieved her.

At this moment Marguerite herself appeared.

She was clad in a long traveling garment and carried a hand satchel, which she deposited upon a trunk.

"Marguerite!" her husband exclaimed aghast, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It means that I am going to America with you," she calmly returned.

His heart bounded into his throat at her words.

"But you cannot," he said; "there is no time for you to get ready."

"I am all ready—my trunks are packed and everything you will need also. I have only to put on my hat and gloves when the carriage comes," she answered.

Reginald regarded her with astonishment not un-mixed with perplexity.

He had not once suspected her intention; but it now explained her strange silence when he had told her at lunch of his plans. He knew that even then she had made up her mind to accompany him.

"I had not thought of your going," he faltered.

"I know you had not, Reginald," Marguerite re-

plied in a proud, hurt tone, "but I could not let you go without me—I could not stay behind alone."

"But the house——" he began.

"The house will do well enough," she interposed. "Norah and I have put away everything of value. All the silver has been packed and sent to a safe deposit, and she is competent to look after everything during my absence, while I have written down minute directions for her to follow, and sent a letter to Monsieur D'Artelle to have a care of the premises. I have done everything I could think of so that we could both leave without experiencing any anxiety; and, Reginald," with an appealing glance, "I simply could not remain behind."

"Why?" was on the point of his tongue to ask, but he crushed it back, feeling sure that it was only because she was timid about being left alone, although he had begged Dr. Martin to look after her during his absence.

"You have stolen quite a march upon me," he said, smiling a little, "and you have surely been expeditious, for you have accomplished a great deal in a few hours."

"Yes," she responded, with a sigh, for she was very weary, "we have all worked hard this afternoon; but," she added, cheerfully, "you know 'where there is a will there is a way.'"

"It will be a long and weary journey for you, Marguerite, for I must travel rapidly," Reginald remarked, gravely. "I am afraid you will be worn out before we reach San Francisco."

"I know the distance is great; but do not mind me.

Go as rapidly as you please; I will not annoy or hinder you," she answered.

"If I had known of your intention I should not have approved it," he said, thoughtfully. "I am tempted to veto it even now."

"Reginald, I must go; I *will* go!" she retorted, passionately, then turning quickly, she darted back into her own room, where, dropping her face into her hands for a moment, she sobbed out:

"Oh, how could he bear to leave me behind if he cares in the least for me?"

Reginald realized that it would be useless to attempt to persuade her to remain, and he experienced a secret joy over the stand she had taken, for the prospective separation had seemed almost more than he could endure.

He had made such a sudden start he had not thought it would be possible for her to get ready to go with him and arrange to leave the house. But as he realized what she had accomplished during the few hours that had elapsed since he made his plans known to her, he marveled at her executive ability and the rare judgment she had evinced in her preparations, while her recent manifestation of wilfulness rather pleased him than otherwise.

She had never openly opposed him before. She did not always agree with him by any means, for Marguerite was an independent thinker and had a standard of her own regarding all questions; but she had heretofore always exercised such tact in differing with him that it had not seemed like opposition, and so this

bold and passionate defiance was a novelty which he rather enjoyed, especially as he had so dreaded leaving her.

He was soon ready for his journey, and going below, he found Marguerite there before him, giving some last directions to Norah and the other servants.

Norah was to be mistress during her absence, she said, and her directions were to be implicitly obeyed, and she urged them to be as faithful to her interests as if she was there to direct them personally.

But there was not time for many last words, for the carriage came, and they were obliged to hurry away to catch their train.

Their passage across the Atlantic was rather a rough one, and Reginald was nearly as ill as he had been on the previous voyage.

The first two days out Marguerite herself was somewhat under the weather, but she quickly rallied and devoted herself as faithfully to her husband as before.

It was well that she could, for there was so much sickness on board that he would have received very little attention if he had depended upon the stewards.

He was not able to go on deck until the morning of the day before that on which they expected to land, and it was only by dint of coaxing and pleading that Marguerite succeeded in getting him there then, for he was so reduced in strength he felt too languid to move.

But after he was comfortably established in a sunny corner, he felt so much invigorated and refreshed, and looked so much brighter that Marguerite was delighted, and leaning over the back of his chair, actuated

by a sudden impulse, she took his wan face between her hands, looked roguishly down into his eyes, and demanded, with an air of triumph:

"There, sir, aren't you glad now that I came with you?"

He flushed. She was so lovely, so eager—there was such a happy look about her eyes that he could almost believe love had prompted her impulsive act.

"You surely have been a very kind and attentive nurse, and I am grateful to you for the care you have given me."

Marguerite's face fell.

"Reginald," she said in a low tone and drawing back a little out of his range of vision, "do you remember saying to me once that you did not want my gratitude?"

"Yes," he admitted, flushing again, "and I was thoughtless in expressing myself so; but I did not think you would be so sensitive regarding the word."

"I am your wife, and it is my—my place to take care of you," she murmured.

She wanted to say "I am your wife—I love you and am happy only in caring for you," but somehow her tongue refused to frame the fond words which would have filled him with joy unspeakable.

His lips curled a trifle at her reply, for he thought she wished him to understand that she merely considered it her duty to attend to his comfort.

"I am sorry that I have been such a care to you," he said, coldly, and her hands fell away from his face, dropping heavily at her side; a look of pain swept

over her face and she could have sobbed outright at having been so misunderstood.

Arriving in New York, Reginald insisted upon going on at once, although Marguerite tried to prevail upon him to rest for a day or two, and seven days later they reached San Francisco.

They did not know the street and number of Constance's residence, as her letters had always been addressed to the care of Professor Gardiner; so Reginald said they would drive directly to his office on Post street and inquire where she lived. He did not once think of her having returned to her work there.

Arriving at the building, Reginald alighted and, entering, tapped upon the door of the outer office, but there was no response. He opened the door and entered. The room was empty. He crossed it and knocked upon the door of the inner office.

"Come in!" said a low, sad, but familiar voice, and he instantly obeyed.

Constance was sitting at a desk, writing, and her very attitude told the fond brother something of the sorrow and trial which she had endured since their last meeting.

As he did not speak—for he was deeply moved—she looked up.

There was an instant of silence, then she dropped her pen and threw out both hands to him with a sob of joy.

"Reginald!" she cried.

"My broken-hearted darling!" he exclaimed, while

two great tears rolled over his cheeks as he caught her to him and rained kisses upon her thin, white face.

It was a touching meeting. For the first time since her husband's death Constance gave free course to her overcharged heart, and sobbed out her wretchedness upon her brother's breast; while he, hardly less unnerved, held her close in mute but loving sympathy.

But both became more calm after a few moments, and Constance, wiping away her tears, looked up in his face and remarked, with a pathetic smile:

"It is like a new staff of life to have you once more, Reginald, but now I must inquire for Marguerite."

"She is here—waiting in the carriage outside. I will go and bring her to you, and then we will all go to your home," her brother responded. "You look too frail and worn to be at work."

"But—Reginald, is she well?"

"She is in perfect health."

"And—her mind?" Constance continued, flushing. "Her letters have been most kind; but—how will she feel to meet me?"

"Her mania has all disappeared—no one would ever believe that she had ever had any such trouble," Reginald said, reassuringly.

"Does she remember anything about that day?" his sister questioned, anxiously, while she shivered slightly as she recalled the dreadful experience.

"No; she never knew anything about it," Reginald returned. "She could not have been conscious of what she was doing when she started out that morning, and

has always believed that she only had a very vivid dream of something dreadful happening to you."

"How glad I am!" Constance said, more brightly, "for if she did remember it would always haunt her unpleasantly. Now go and bring her to me—I long to see her. Is she as beautiful as ever?"

"Constance, she is exquisite; she is the most beautiful woman I ever saw!" Reginald said, with a passionate thrill in his voice.

"What a lover-like assertion. How fond you are of her, Reginald!" Constance said, with a smile that was followed by a sigh.

"'Fond of her!' I love her as few men love their wives!" he tremulously returned, and then went hastily from the room to bring Marguerite.

"How long you were gone, Reginald!" she remarked when he appeared.

"Yes, for I found Constance here."

"Here!" she repeated, with surprise.

"Yes, working for the bread she eats," he returned, bitterly. "But she wants you to come up for a few minutes," he added.

Marguerite alighted and followed her husband upstairs to the office, where Constance was anxiously awaiting her.

In spite of Reginald's assurance of her perfect sanity, Constance rather dreaded this meeting with her brother's lovely wife.

But she was not left long in doubt regarding the state of her feelings toward her, for the moment Marguerite entered the room she glided swiftly to her side,

wound her arms about her slight figure and murmured:

"Constance—dear sister! Will you let me be that to you? Will you love me as such?"

Constance had not dared to hope for so tender a greeting as this, but her heart went out instantly to this stately, beautiful creature who was looking down upon her with such a tender light in her great brown eyes.

She raised her head and pressed her lips to those which had just pleaded for her affection.

"I have long loved you for Reginald's sake, but now I am sure I shall love you for your own," she said, with lips that quivered with emotion. "There!" she added as she caught the sound of steps on the stairs, "I hear Professor Gardiner coming. I must introduce you both to him and then we will go home."

The professor entered the room at that moment, and Constance, leading Reginald forward, presented him to her friend.

The two men shook hands cordially, and then, as the elder gentleman studied the fine face of the younger, he remarked, with some surprise:

"Well, my friend, you surely have lost no time! I did not think you would be here for several days yet!"

"We started the very day we received Mr. Everet's dispatch, and have traveled incessantly," Reginald explained, and then Constance interposed as she came forward with Marguerite:

"Professor Gardiner——"

He turned at the sound of his name and glanced at

the beautiful stranger who stood waiting to be introduced to him, when, with a cry which echoed agonizingly through the room, he threw up his arms, exclaiming:

“Great heavens! Marguerite! my wife!”

CHAPTER XXI.

“WILL YOU TRY TO LOVE YOUR FATHER?”

Professor Gardiner started forward as if about to fold Marguerite to his breast, then suddenly stopped short, his hands dropped heavily by his side, and he sunk upon a chair with a groan which seemed forced from a breaking heart, while his face was absolutely colorless and convulsed with pain.

Marguerite gave one startled, questioning glance at her husband; the next moment she was kneeling beside the chair of the stricken professor.

“Tell me! tell me!” she cried in an eager, intense voice, “was Marguerite Delavigne your wife?”

He did not reply for a moment, but turned and searched the beautiful face of the kneeling woman with eyes that seemed hungering to feast upon its every lineament and stamp it indelibly upon his brain.

“What do you know of Marguerite Delavigne?” he asked in a hollow tone. “Oh!” he continued, a great trembling seizing him, “it seems as if you must be her very self; but you are scarcely twenty-five, and she would have been nearly forty-five if——”

"Was she your wife?" authoritatively, yet tremulously, persisted Marguerite.

"Ay! my idolized wife—the very light of my eyes—the joy of my heart!" he answered, with such passionate earnestness that it drew tears to the eyes of the three listeners.

"Prove it to me," said Marguerite in a scarcely audible tone.

He regarded her with a perplexed but eager, questioning look for a moment; then, rising, he tottered to his desk, unlocked a drawer, and took from it a box which he brought and put into Marguerite's hands.

With fingers that trembled visibly she removed the cover and took out a photograph.

But for the different style of dress and the way the hair was arranged, it was the very counterpart of herself.

Without a word she passed it to Reginald, who was scarcely less excited than herself over this unexpected *denouement*. Then she lifted a lock of hair—a soft little coil that was tied with a cherry ribbon. It was fine and glossy as silk and of the exact shade of her own.

Next she removed a folded paper. Opening it, she saw that it was a marriage license, which proved the legality of Marguerite Delavigne's union with William Gardiner. The man had not once removed his eyes from her while she was thus engaged.

Hope, fear, perplexity, pain and eager surprise swept in quick succession over his face as he watched her and realized that she was actuated by some motive of vital importance.

She slowly and reverently replaced everything as she had found it, and as she restored the box to Professor Gardiner she lifted an appealing glance to his face and remarked, tremulously:

"I am Marguerite Delavigne's daughter."

"Oh!" cried the man, an expression of blended incredulity and amazement sweeping over his face, "that cannot be possible."

"Did you not know that she had a daughter?" Marguerite demanded.

"I never dreamed of such a thing," Professor Gardiner groaned.

His three listeners looked amazed at this assertion, and the agitated man continued:

"But, oh, if you are her child, then you are mine also, for she was my wife, as I have proved to you!"

"Sit down, Marguerite," Reginald now said, coming forward with a chair, for he could see that she was almost spent with this exciting scene.

Marguerite obeyed him, but with her great brown eyes studying the face of the professor as if she would read his inmost thoughts, while questions were crowding thick and fast upon her own mind.

If he was her father—and there could be little doubt of it—was he worthy of her love and respect? If her mother had been his legal wife, how could it be possible that he did not know of the existence of his child? Why had he deserted her mother? Why had she been compelled to abandon her child in a strange land? How, when, where had she died?

She could not acknowledge him as her father or yield him one jot of filial regard until all these mys-

terious questions were explained, even though to all appearance he was now a grand and noble man, and had proved himself to be such by his exceeding kindness to Constance.

"Let me tell you the story of my marriage with Marguerite Delavigne," the professor began after struggling to regain his self possession, which had been sadly shaken. "I was twenty-four years of age when, having graduated from Harvard College, in Massachusetts, I went abroad—to Paris—to complete a special course of scientific studies. During my sojourn there I met Marguerite, the only child of a noted artist. She was the loveliest girl I had ever seen, and it was not long before I began to realize that she was all the world to me. This regard proved to be mutual, but I soon perceived that my attentions to Mademoiselle Delavigne did not meet the approval of her parents. Monsieur Delavigne, who occupied a high position in Parisian circles, evidently considered that I was not a proper suitor for his daughter's hand. I would not take an unfair advantage of him by striving to win his child in an underhanded way, so I made no secret of my admiration for her, but, feeling sure that she loved me devotedly, I went to him boldly, frankly stated my feelings, and asked the privilege of openly addressing her.

"The distinguished artist scorned my suit, however. He had planned to wed his child to the only scion of an aristocratic family. I was a foreigner, poor and insignificant compared with himself, and he forbade me to hold any farther intercourse with her. But I was young, hot-headed, and very deeply in love.

I knew that Marguerite was equally fond of me. I told her the result of my interview with her father, and she vowed eternal faithfulness to me. She could not live without me she said; even if I was comparatively poor she would share my poverty, for her own magnificent home would be but a gilded cage if I was forbidden an entrance there; while she was so frightened and distressed at the possibility of being forced to marry the man of her father's choice that we finally resolved to take our destiny into our own hands and forestall Monsieur Delavigne's designs by a secret marriage.

"I do not approve of secret marriages," the professor here interposed. "They are wrong, and it is a cowardly way by which to gain one's own ends. If young people love each other and are determined to marry, let them openly avow it, boldly meet whatever opposition there may be, and take the consequences. But we did not pause to consider these points at that time, and one bright day we went to Champigny, a little village eight miles from Paris, and were quietly married. I took my lovely wife to a simple but cozy home in this same village, and from there she wrote to her father, telling him what she had done. I also sent him a frank, respectful letter, promising that I would make his daughter happy and never rest until I attained a position which would command his respect.

"Monsieur Delavigne was furious, and the only reply he vouchsafed was to send a purse containing twenty-five thousand francs and a curt note to Marguerite, telling her that he would never forgive her and forbidding her ever to return to her home. This was a bitter sentence to my darling, but her love for

me was so great that she counted it a small trial compared to that of being separated from me and being compelled to marry a man whom she did not love.

"We were very happy for several months, during which I studied diligently, for I was determined to fit myself for a high position when I should return to my own country. I meant to show Monsieur Delavigne that I could secure his daughter the *entree* to society equal to that in which she had always been accustomed to move.

"But suddenly there came a message telling me that my father was very ill—that I must return to America immediately if I would see him alive.

"I had not as yet revealed the fact of my marriage to him, for I knew that he would consider it a rash proceeding on my part, since I had not completed my studies; therefore I felt that it would be very unwise to take my wife home with me, to agitate him in his critical state.

"She agreed with me that it would be best for her not to go; but the parting was a terrible trial to us both, although I promised to return to Marguerite at the earliest possible moment. I was within a month of my graduation, and it was an added disappointment to me that I could not remain to receive my diploma with my class. But, in view of the urgent circumstances, the faculty promised that the document should be granted me if my examination papers proved to be satisfactory.

"So I bade my darling farewell and hastened to my father's bedside. I found him alive, and the pleasure he experienced at my return seemed to do him good, and he began to rally immediately.

"Our home was in Brooklyn, New York, and our family consisted only of my father and myself with a cousin, Annie Wilton, who was an orphan and the daughter of my mother's only sister. She was about my own age and had lived with us for many years.

"My father lingered for several months, but was so feeble I dared not leave him to return to my wife, for his physician said there was no possibility of his recovery, and he was liable to drop away at any time. Several times I was on the point of confessing my marriage to him and asking him to allow me to send for Marguerite, but the fear that the excitement would make him worse and perhaps hasten his end kept me from doing so.

"Meantime my letters from Marguerite suddenly ceased, and I became almost distracted with anxiety. In vain I wrote by every steamer, begging for one line, one word even, to tell me that she was safe and well. I could get no tidings whatever from her, and at last began to fear treachery on the part of her father—that he was planning to separate us.

"Thus six months passed, and then my father suddenly passed away. There were some business matters which I was obliged to attend to after his burial, but as soon as these were disposed of I sailed for Europe to seek my wife, fully intending to return immediately with her.

"You can perhaps imagine something of my grief and consternation when upon my arrival in Champigny I could find no trace of her. Our little home had been dismantled and shut up. I could not even ascertain the whereabouts of the servant whom we had kept. Of

course I suspected that Marguerite's father was at the bottom of it all, and I immediately wrote to Monsieur Delavigne, demanding some tidings of my lost one.

"My letter was returned to me unopened. This but confirmed my suspicions, and, nearly distracted, I boldly went to the Chateau Bernous—his palatial residence—and requested an interview. But he refused to see me, sending word by the servant who admitted me commanding me never to enter his doors again. I searched Champigny and Paris over and over; I advertised; I had detectives at work for me; but no trace did I ever get of my lost wife, although I did not lose my courage nor relax my efforts for two long, wearisome years.

"I was finally compelled, however, to believe that she was either dead or had been forced by her unrelenting father to enter some convent, where she would be the same as dead to me; and so at last, broken hearted and discouraged, I returned to America and tried to find what solace I could in my profession.

"My father had left me a comfortable property and charged me to care for my cousin—to see that she had an income sufficient to give her a good support during her life.

"This I was very willing—even glad—to do, for Annie and I had always been the best of friends. I consulted with her regarding her future, telling her that I would arrange a home for her wherever she preferred, as I intended to sell the house where we had always lived, for I had secured a promising position in the West.

"Then I learned to my great astonishment and dis-

may that my cousin loved me—had loved me for years, and the thought of our approaching separation had surprised the secret from her. The knowledge made me very unhappy, for with my heart so absorbed in my lost wife and still uncertain regarding her fate, I could not, of course, ever entertain the thought of a second marriage. So I revealed to her my secret—laid bare my whole heart to her, and told her that I should live my life out alone, unless, indeed, kind Providence should restore my lost one.

“Upon this revelation she suddenly became like an iceberg to me, and I thought the kindest thing I could do would be to take myself out of her sight as soon as possible. I settled upon her one-half of the property which my father had left me, then bidding her a long farewell, I came West, where I have spent the greater portion of my life. My cousin married a year or two later. I received a paper containing the announcement of the fact, but have never seen nor heard from her since.

“But for the love which I have always had for my work I must either have died or become a madman long ago, for I have never become one whit more reconciled to the loss of my beautiful wife and the mysterious circumstances attending it than on the day when I first learned the terrible fact,” the professor concluded, with a heavy sigh.

“And you have never gained even the slightest clew to the mystery?” Reginald remarked.

“Never. I have been to Paris and Champigny several times, in the hope of learning something, but her fate is still as much of a secret to me as ever. The

last time I was in Paris—some six years ago—I learned that both monsieur and his wife were dead; but beyond that bare fact I could gain no information nor ascertain into whose hands their large property had passed. Now,” he concluded, turning to Marguerite, while he glanced at Reginald, “I understand that you are Dr. Alexander’s wife, but while your remarkable resemblance to my lost one, together with your knowledge of her, seem to point to the presumption that you are also my child, yet I cannot understand how it is possible. If you can throw any light upon the matter or upon the mysterious story which I have told you, I beg that you will do so.”

“I am afraid,” Marguerite began, sadly, “that the mystery of my mother’s fate must remain such to the end of time, for I know nothing about it.”

“Oh!” cried Professor Gardiner in a tone of intense pain and disappointment, “do not tell me that, for when you told me that you were Marguerite Delavigne’s child, I felt sure that at last I should learn something regarding her strange disappearance.”

“I wish it were possible for me to explain it,” Marguerite sighed; “but the most I can do is to tell you my own history as far as I know it,” and she then related how she had been found by Mr. and Mrs. Arnold upon the steps of their house in Brooklyn and adopted by them.

“In Brooklyn, New York?” exclaimed the professor, aghast.

“Yes.”

“Can that be possible! Then that at least proves that my Marguerite must have followed me to Amer-

ica. What can it mean? But—perhaps, after all, you are not her child, in spite of the wonderful resemblance,” the unhappy man concluded in distress.

“I think there can be no doubt of that fact,” Marguerite quietly replied, “for the letter my mother wrote begging Mr. and Mrs. Arnold to adopt me goes to prove it, if nothing else could do so. I have it now—I always take it with me—and doubtless you would recognize her writing——”

“Yes! yes! I should know Marguerite’s writing anywhere,” the man exclaimed, excitedly. “Let me see the letter.”

Marguerite wore a small square locket attached as an ornament to her watch chain.

Opening this, she took from it a sheet of fine French paper folded to fit it, and spreading it out with great care, she passed it to the professor, but she had purposely refrained from mentioning the crest in the corner of the sheet.

The man was greatly agitated, and the hand he held out to take it shook as if he had palsy.

“Yes! ah me!” he cried, forcing back a sob that arose to his lips as his eyes eagerly devoured the pathetic lines which the despairing mother had written; “every line of this was penned by her hand; every letter is as familiar to me as those of my own name. What can it mean? Oh, Heaven! what strange words for her to have written: ‘Before many days her wretched mother—her only parent—will be dead!’ Ha! and here is the Delavigne crest. Wait!”

He started to his feet, and again going to his desk, took from the same drawer where he had kept the box

containing the photograph a small package of letters.

Removing one from the envelope, he handed it to Marguerite.

She eagerly unfolded it and discovered, to her surprise, that the paper was exactly like her own. The writing was identical, and the same crest was also stamped on the left-hand corner.

"There can be no doubt," she breathed, lifting her beautiful eyes to the man who was watching her intently.

"You feel sure?" he questioned, almost breathlessly.

"Quite sure."

"And, my child, can you recognize in me—can you own me as your—father?" Professor Gardiner asked as he laid his hand with an appealing touch upon her shoulder.

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, rising and half extending her clasped hands toward him, "if I might but find some one akin to me! It has been the prayer of my yearning heart for years."

He gently took those clasped hands, drew her to him, and laid them upon his breast, while his hungry eyes eagerly scanned her lovely face.

"My dear," he said in a tender, reverent tone. "God is good, since He saw fit to take the love of my youth from me, in giving me the image of my lost Marguerite to comfort the declining years of my life. Will you try to love your father?"

"I think it will not be a difficult task," Marguerite responded, with a tremulous smile, as she lifted her face and softly touched his cheek with her lips.

A deep sob heaved the strong man's chest. He

folded her to him in a close embrace for a moment, then he suddenly released her, saying in a broken voice, while great tears rolled over his cheeks:

"Pardon an old man's weakness. I cannot bear it."

He turned abruptly, walked within the other room and shut the door; for the strange mingling of grief and joy, which utterly unmanned him, was too deep and sacred to be witnessed even by his own child.

Marguerite turned her streaming eyes upon her husband.

"Oh, Reginald, to think that I have found my father!" she murmured; then, covering her face with her hands, she had to relieve her joy-burdened heart in sobs which could no longer be restrained.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BEHOLD ME! I AM WORTHY OF THY LOVING, FOR I
LOVE THEE!"

Reginald and Constance had been deeply interested witnesses of the foregoing scene.

Constance had long known that Professor Gardiner had had grave trouble of some kind, for it will be remembered that she came upon him suddenly one day when he was overcome by grief occasioned by sad memories.

She was greatly rejoiced now by these revelations, which would make his remaining years so happy and give him the comfort and delight of such a daughter as Marguerite.

Reginald, while he also was glad to have Marguerite's identity established, her honorable parentage proved, and her right to the Delavigne estate confirmed, was agitated by a strange feeling, almost amounting to jealousy, regarding these new relations of father and daughter.

"She will have his love now to feed upon and give her a new interest in life, and I shall stand a poorer chance than ever to win her heart," he said to himself, while a feeling of desolation oppressed him. "How naturally she leaned upon his breast, yielding to his embrace, and even voluntarily giving him a caress, while I have never been allowed to kiss so much as her hand."

And yet when she had turned to him with that note of joy in her voice over having found her father, it had shown him that she longed to have him share her happiness and looked to him for sympathy before any one else. Still, he was troubled with the fear that this new love might crowd out the feeling of dependence which hitherto she had felt toward him.

"I am very glad, Marguerite," he had said in response to her remark, but in such a grave, constrained tone as to attract her attention, and she found him regarding her with a wistful look which made her heart thrill with hope.

"He does love me still," she thought. "I shall win him yet, and I really believe he is afraid that I shall learn to care more for my father than I do for him."

Professor Gardiner did not shut himself away long from his new-found daughter. He soon made his appearance again, with traces of deep emotion upon his

face, but with a smile of tender affection lighting up his features.

"I think," he remarked, glancing at Constance, "that we must take a holiday in honor of the coming of these two important people. Suppose we adjourn at once to your home, my dear."

"Yes, indeed," Constance replied, and starting up on hospitable thoughts intent; and another hour found them gathered about her table, partaking of a dainty lunch, while the past was more freely discussed, questions asked and answered, and other matters that had not at first occurred to them, explained.

The professor had never appeared so jolly and care free, and Constance thoroughly enjoyed hearing his hearty laugh and seeing his kind old eyes so full of unwonted tenderness and joy as they lingered upon the face of his beautiful daughter.

When the lunch was over he went away to find Laurence Everet and bring him to meet his old friend; while Constance sought her maid of all work to consult with her about dinner for her "houseful of company."

Thus Reginald and his wife were left for a little time to entertain themselves.

A sudden silence fell upon them with the departure of their companions.

Marguerite sat by a window looking absently out into the tiny garden adjoining the house, but evidently absorbed in deep thought and apparently forgetful of her husband's presence.

Reginald bore this state of things as long as he could, then rising, he went and stood by her side.

"Well, Marguerite," he said, "the great question is at last settled. You are really the child of Marguerite Delavigne, and have the power to prove it and then take possession of the Delavigne estate."

"Yes, I was thinking of the same thing; but——"

"Well, but what?" he asked as she stopped short in the midst of her sentence.

"I do not think I shall claim the Delavigne estate," she gravely returned.

"What!" exclaimed her husband in a startled tone.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I do not want it."

"Do not want it! What can you mean? It is a magnificent estate, and there must be a great deal of accumulated money besides."

"Yes, undoubtedly," Marguerite thoughtfully returned, "but that does not tempt me particularly. I shall claim my mother's portrait, together with some of the finer pictures and bric-a-brac, but everything else may go toward the purpose named in Monsieur Delavigne's will."

"Marguerite, this is all folly!" Reginald exclaimed, astonished. "Surely you do not mean what you say?"

"Yes, I do. I have more money than I desire now. I do not want the care of any more," she said, with a sigh.

"But I will relieve you of the care, if that is what troubles you," he returned. "It is worse than folly for you to thus renounce what would give you so much prestige among your own countrymen."

He began to feel considerable pride about the matter.

Marguerite arose and stood before him, the light of a strong purpose beaming in her eyes.

"Will you share it with me?" she asked. "Will you regard it as much yours as mine and use it as freely?"

"No, I cannot promise you that," he replied in a constrained tone.

"Why? when you have expected me to depend upon you and insisted upon lavishing upon me every luxury which your means would allow."

"That is a different matter," he said. "You are a woman and my wife, and it is my duty to provide for you."

"That is a very one-sided argument," Marguerite retorted spiritedly. "It is no more your duty to share what you have with me than mine to share with you, simply because I am 'a woman.' Look!" she went on, passionately, while she pointed into the tree just outside the window; "see that robin redbreast sitting upon his nest while his mate is gone to search for food. Presently she will return; she will bring some trophy back with her to share with him. Will he reject it from any feeling of false pride? Will he refuse it simply because she happens to be the lady bird?"

"Ah, but, Marguerite, the lady bird loves her mate, the trophy she brings will be a love offering, and that makes all the difference in the world," Reginald sadly returned. "I could not—I will not be beholden in any way to the wife who does not love me," he concluded, with passionate vehemence, a wave of hot color mounting to his brow.

There was a moment of painful silence when he ceased.

"Reginald!" Marguerite said at last in a tremulous tone as she lifted a luminous glance to his face.

"Well?" he replied, turning his gaze slowly from the contemplation of the bird upon its nest to her.

He started slightly as he met her look, for there was a light in those beautiful eyes that he had never seen in them before.

She leaned toward him, her red lips parted and tremulous with suppressed emotion, while her white hands were tightly clasped, as if thus to fortify herself for the bold venture she was about to make.

"Would you—will you be 'beholden' to the wife who—does love you?" she breathed, appealingly.

"Marguerite!" he cried in a tone of sharp agony, "you must not trifle with me!"

"I—am not trifling with you—dear," she murmured, a burning flush suffusing her face. Then she added, catching her breath with a little sob: "Oh, Reginald! how blind you have been! How wretched you have made me with your coldness for almost a year!"

The veins swelled out full and hard upon his forehead. His arms were folded tightly across his chest, as if to repress the mighty throbbings of his heart, which had suddenly been electrified by her wonderful confession.

"Marguerite! do you mean it?" he said, hoarsely. "*Do you love me*—not with the tame affection of a sister or a friend, but with the love that would lead

you to choose me from all the world and such as you know I must have to make my life complete?"

"My husband," she responded, with downcast eyes and burning cheeks, "I love you with my whole heart. I love you so well that—though it would blight my life—unless you can take me into your heart of hearts I cannot go back to France with you. I cannot live in your presence and bear the coldness and indifference that have made me so wretched for more than a year."

"Is this true? Kind Heaven! have I won you at last, Marguerite—my wife?" he cried in a voice that thrilled her to the centre of her being.

He opened his arms to her, and with a look of joy which told him that she had indeed given him her priceless love, she bowed her stately head upon his breast, while he folded her close in his eager embrace.

"At last," he murmured as he softly touched his lips to her white forehead, "my love! my love! at last my life is to be crowned with happiness."

Neither spoke for a moment or two; their full hearts could find no expression in words; it was enough for each to know that all barriers had at last been swept away and that henceforth they would be one in the most sacred sense of the word.

"Marguerite," Reginald at length breathed in a low, fond tone. She lifted her face, and he saw that it was wet with tears; but the luminous light in her eyes told him that they were only tears of joy. "Kiss me, love," he whispered.

The rich blood swept up to her brow at the request, but she unhesitatingly raised her red lips to his, while involuntarily her arm stole around his neck, and he

knew that never again would she shrink from his caresses.

"Now I know it is true," he said as he pushed back the soft rings of hair from her brow and pressed kiss after kiss upon it.

A roguish light began to dance in her eyes.

"Simply because I receive your caresses, when I have been yearning for so long to offer my own and you have coldly repulsed me," she said, with a bright little laugh.

"Repulsed you! I should like to know when!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Sit down, sir, and I will prove it to you," she commanded, with a pretty imperiousness that amused him.

He obeyed, and, going behind him, she took his face in both her hands and repeated, with a sly smile:

"'There, sir, aren't you glad now that I came with you?' "

He understood her and remembered how eager and happy she had looked on shipboard when she had asked him that question.

"And this human iceberg replied: 'You surely have been a very kind and attentive nurse, and I am grateful to you for the care you have given me,' " she quoted, mimicking the distant tone he had used.

Reginald flushed.

"Did I say it like that, Marguerite?"

"Exactly; and I was just dying to have you say something kind and loving to me, when I should instantly have done this—and this—and this," she concluded, kissing him softly upon his brow, cheek and lips.

He drew her around to his side and then down upon his knee.

"Ah, love, I am afraid that I have been blind," he returned, with a sigh of regret, "but we will never misunderstand each other again. When did you begin to realize that you could love me, my darling?"

"The evening you told me of Noel Southworth's crime and desertion of his wife," Marguerite answered.

"So long ago!" her husband cried, astonished.

"Yes. I saw then that I had been worshiping an idol of clay—that I was allowing a morbid sentiment for a weak and selfish coward to ruin my life, when a heart of gold and a future blessed beyond measure were within my reach. Oh, Reginald! as your grand character stood out before me in such vivid contrast to his, I saw how weak and blind I had been; and yet, in my wounded pride and unreasonable resentment at your harmless deception regarding your name, I rejected all your overtures of peace and reconciliation, even though my heart was then yearning for your love. Then when you began to weary of my coldness and to be cool and distant yourself, I feared that I had exhausted your patience, and so, like the vacillating creature I was, I tried to win you back again."

"We surely have been playing at cross purposes for a long time. How much we have lost!" Reginald observed, regretfully.

"Yes, and I have a been a great care and trouble to you, dear. I wonder that you could have been so patient with me," Marguerite returned, contritely.

"You are not to reproach yourself, my darling, for

you also have been very patient and faithful. But we will not look backward when the future is so bright before us. And you are all mine now, dear?" he concluded, inquiringly, and yearning for renewed expressions of tenderness from her.

"Yes, provided——"

"What! are there still some reservations?" Reginald questioned, but smiling as he observed the bewitching little pout on her lips.

"I make none," she said, with significant emphasis.

"I am sure I do not," he responded, with some surprise.

"Are you quite sure?" she asked, bending down to look straight into his eyes while she slyly slipped her arm about his neck. "Remember, I am the only heir to the Delavigne estate."

"You are my wife!" he cried, catching her to his heart, "and whatever pertains to your interest becomes mine also. Henceforth there shall not be even the shadow of a barrier between us."

It was a very happy party that gathered in Constance's simple but home-like parlor that evening after dinner. Even the face of the fair young widow wore a brighter look than it had worn since her husband's death.

Old times were talked over, though no reference was made to the man who had cast such a blight upon the lives of two of the company. Marguerite's strange history and the stranger discovery of her father was discussed, while many plans were laid for the future.

Reginald said that he and his wife would be obliged to return to Paris at the end of a month, as he wished

to institute immediate proceedings to establish Marguerite's claim to the Delavigne estate, and he did not like to be absent longer than that from his duties in the hospital.

It was suggested that Professor Gardiner would have to accompany them, in order to the better prove his marriage with the daughter of Monsieur Delavigne.

"Of course I shall go, and I shall remain abroad," he said, with a fond glance at Marguerite. "Having found my child, I cannot be separated from her again; and since I can do my work as well in one country as another, there is no reason why we should be parted."

"You have forestalled me, my father," Marguerite remarked, turning to him with a brilliant smile. "I intended to propose that you return to make your home with us. I have in mind a beautiful room in the Chateau Bernous, where, I am sure, you will write with far more enthusiasm than could be kindled in the office where I found you this morning."

And thus it seemed like the irony of fate that William Gardiner should be destined to occupy that lovely studio where the haughty artist who had refused to acknowledge him as the husband of his daughter had painted some of his finest pictures.

"Constance and Alice are also going home with us, and it will be perfectly delightful to be all together," Marguerite added, with an affectionate glance at her sister-in-law.

"Then I shall not lose sight of my faithful little amanuensis," said the professor, smiling. "I am very glad, for she is like another daughter to me."

Constance made no reply. She had darted a covert look at Laurence, and found him regarding her with a very disconsolate expression, which brought a tinge of scarlet into her cheeks, and, making some excuse, she hurriedly left the room to cover her confusion.

A month passed very quickly and very happily.

Reginald and Marguerite spent the most of it in visiting places of note in California, as they had never been West before, and it might be long ere they would have another opportunity.

It was their "real wedding trip," Reginald said; and Marguerite wondered if there was ever a newly-married couple as happy during their honeymoon as they were.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

One morning during the absence of Reginald and Marguerite, Professor Gardiner entered his office and found a black-edged envelope lying upon his desk.

Exceedingly surprised, for he had very few friends who would be likely to send him such a missive, he opened it and found another sealed envelope within, together with a few lines informing him that his cousin, Mrs. Annie Wilton Reynolds, had recently died, and the inclosed letter addressed to him had been found among her private papers, and were herewith forwarded to him.

Greatly astonished and somewhat perplexed as well,

the professor broke the seal and read the following strange and startling communication:

"TO MY COUSIN, WILLIAM GARDINER: I dare not presume to address you as 'my dear cousin,' although my feelings toward you have never changed; but since I have a confession to make which will doubtless crush out of your heart whatever regard you may once have entertained for me, it will become me, perhaps, to restrain all expressions of affection for you.

"William Gardiner, you will be astonished to learn that I alone am to blame for the ruin of your happiness. You start; you wonder what such an assertion can possibly mean. Let me tell you as briefly as I can.

"When you returned from Paris at the request of your dying father, I was not long in discovering that you had left your heart behind you, and loving you as I did, with all the strength of an unusually strong nature, this knowledge aroused both my anger and jealousy.

"Letters came to you with every steamer, addressed in a lady's delicate handwriting. I did not hesitate to read them, and thus I learned your secret—you were a married man!

"All that was good in me died with that discovery, for I had hoped to win you—had hoped that you would choose me for your wife. In my pain and wrath I rashly began to intercept your letters. Not one that you wrote after that was ever received by your French bride; not one that she wrote ever found its way to you. They were all read by me, however, and then burned in the privacy of my own room.

"After your father's death, as soon as I learned the date you intended to sail—which was some two weeks previous to your departure—I cabled to your wife in

your name to come on a certain steamer. She, never suspecting that she was the victim of any treachery, obeyed the command, and passed you in midocean. When she arrived in New York she came directly to your father's house, as directed. I met her there—for you will remember I was left to see that everything was in order for the people who were to take the house—I met her as if I had never dreamed that there was such a person in the universe. She introduced herself as your wife and said you had sent for her to come to you. I laughed in her face. I told her that she could not be your wife—that you had only been fooling her; that you were going to marry me as soon as you had returned from the West, whither you had gone to secure a position that had been offered you, and she need never expect you again.

“The poor, foolish thing believed me and was heart-broken. I feigned pity for her, and told her that I would care for her until she should be able to go back to her own people, for I saw that she was soon to become a mother.

“But she scorned my aid, and left me with a look on her young face such as I never wish to see on another. I kept track of her, however, and three months later learned that she had given birth to a little girl. I was ill after that for several weeks, but as soon as I was able to get out I went to ascertain how the pretty French girl and her baby were progressing. The woman of whom she had hired her room told me that she was dead. She had been ailing ever since the birth of her child; but one night she went out after dark, taking it with her, and several hours later had returned without it, burning with fever and delirious. She grew rapidly worse, and though the people in the house tried to learn what she had done with her baby, they could not make her tell anything about it, although she babbled incessantly of ‘William’ and ‘Marguerite.’ She died two days later. Her body was put

in a receiving tomb for awhile in the hope that her friends would claim it. Later I had it laid in Greenwood. You will find the grave on Elm Avenue, Lot No. —, and marked with a simple headstone on which is chiseled the name 'Marguerite.'

"I am facing death myself now, but I cannot die until I have confessed to you what I have done.

"I have been a wife for many years, but my love for you has never changed, and I hoped for a long time that when you found your search for your wife useless you might seek sympathy and love from me.

"But when that hope failed me I married, hoping, by assuming new cares and duties, to forget my hopeless passion for you.

"I know that I committed a terrible sin against you and your dainty French wife. Have I repented of it? I do not know. I think the passing years have only tended to harden me, until I have not sufficient feeling left in my heart to realize any regret for my sins.

"Before this reaches you I, too, shall be laid beneath the turf in Greenwood. I do not ask you to forgive me—it would be but mockery to do so; so forget, if you can, your cousin,

ANNIE WILTON."

When Professor Gardiner finished reading this dreadful confession, he sat for a long time staring blankly at the closely-written sheets which he held in his hands.

His face was very pale and haggard, and there was the despairing look of a hunted animal in his eyes, while his heart quaked with horror over the fiendish tale that he had just been reading.

The mystery of his young wife's fate was all explained at last; but what an explanation it was!

What sorrow and want, what desolation and suffering it revealed! what diabolical treachery and heartlessness!

His idolized Marguerite had been decoyed from the shelter of her home by a false message just as he was returning to her. They had passed each other in mid-ocean. She had come alone to a strange land, believing she was coming to his tender care and protection, only to be told that her husband was a libertine and a villain—only to have her heart broken, her character ruined, her self-respect shattered by the belief that she was no wife, and that her child, when it should be born, would be nameless.

What a fate for this delicately-reared child of fortune—for the only daughter of the distinguished artist, Albert Delavigne!

It seemed to William Gardiner as if he must go mad as he thought it all over and realized more and more fully the fearful tragedy that had ended the life of his beautiful young wife.

Ah! and to think how helpless he had been to succor her, when he would gladly have laid down his own life to have saved her from such a doom.

He understood now why he had never known anything regarding her hopes of motherhood. All her letters, in which she had doubtless given him her entire confidence, had been destroyed by the monster in human form who had so ruthlessly ruined her young life.

And what of her—this cold-blooded woman who had been the cause of so much wretchedness?

She was dead and he could not curse her; but the memory of her turned him cold and sick at heart.

For many days after the reception of this letter he appeared so broken and ill that Constance became exceedingly troubled about him; but by the time Marguerite returned he was more like himself, although it was evident to her that he had been suffering from some great mental strain during her absence.

Professor Gardiner dreaded to tell her the truth, but he wanted her to visit that lonely grave in Greenwood before they sailed for Europe, and he knew that some explanation would be necessary.

So one evening when they were alone he broke it to her as gently as he could.

He would not show her the letter, for he could not bear that she should read the heartless epistle or know the refinement of cruelty which her mother had suffered.

"And so my poor mother believed that she had been wronged and forsaken! That was what she meant by calling herself my 'wretched mother,' my 'only parent,'" she said, sadly.

"Ah, that is the hardest of all! If she could but have known that I was true to her, that I had not played her false!" the professor groaned in bitterness of spirit.

"She does know it now, perhaps," Marguerite gently returned, "and she can never realize any more of sorrow. I would much rather suffer a fate as hers than to live the wretched life of the heartless woman who so wronged her and you."

"It does not seem possible that such unprincipled,

such cruel natures can exist in woman's form," her father exclaimed, with a gesture of aversion.

"They certainly are a libel on our sex," gravely returned Marguerite.

A few days later our friends all bade farewell to San Francisco and left for New York, Laurence Everet accompanying the party across the continent.

A great struggle had been going on in his heart ever since he learned that Constance had decided to go to France to reside with her brother.

He felt that he could not let her go without some word of hope to cheer him; and yet her husband had been dead so short a time he shrunk from anything that seemed like indecent haste in renewing his suit for her hand.

He had a long and confidential conversation with Reginald regarding the matter, telling him the full story of his early love and disappointment, and of the recent discussion which he and Constance had held upon the subject of divorce and second marriages; and the young man bade him not be discouraged; he believed he had every reason to hope that his future would yet be a bright one.

"Come to us six or eight months hence, and I believe you will not come in vain," he said. "And, Laurence, my friend," he added, with his genial smile, "I assure you I will give her to you with my hearty blessing, for I believe that you will make her happy. Between you and me, Southworth was never a favorite of mine, and yet at the time he married Constance I did not dream that he was so weak in character."

Laurence was somewhat comforted by this conver-

sation, although he dreaded the coming separation more than he could express.

The trip across the continent was a very pleasant one, however, for he spent much of the time with Constance, the other members of the party, by common consent, giving them a wide berth and managing to keep Alice entertained, thus leaving the lovers—for such they really were—to the enjoyment of each other's society.

They spent a week in New York, and during this time they all went to Brooklyn to visit that lonely grave in Greenwood.

They found it without any difficulty, but Professor Gardiner, with a stern look on his white, pained face, sought the manager of the cemetery, explained his relationship to the deceased, and ordered him to remove and destroy the stone that marked his wife's grave.

Upon his return to New York he selected a beautiful monument, had his wife's name in full cut upon it, and left orders to have it carefully set up in place of the discarded tablet.

It was very little, he thought, yet it was the most he could do to show his love and faithfulness for the wife of his youth.

The day of sailing arrived at last, and the party went on board the fine steamer *Germanic*, that was to bear them across old ocean.

All appeared to be in the best of spirits, save Laurence and Constance, who were somewhat pale and quiet, although both made an effort to be cheerful.

A little before the moment of parting the young

man drew Constance one side, and as he clasped her hand he remarked in a low, fond tone:

"Constance this is not to be a long good-by, I hope, for Reginald has invited me to visit him the coming summer. May I come? Will you second his invitation?"

"You *know*, Laurence, that I shall be glad to have you come," she responded, with simple earnestness, but her eyes drooped beneath his searching glance and a tinge of color swept over her pale countenance.

His face lighted.

"Will you write to me, Constance?" he asked.

"Certainly. I should feel lost to be in a foreign land and not hear from you—from home," she answered, but her lips quivered in spite of her efforts at self control over this parting.

It was over at last, and as the vessel swung out into the deep, Laurence went back to his hotel, feeling almost as if he had not a friend left on this side of the Atlantic.

The voyagers had a prosperous trip, and at the other end sent word flying back over the wires to him that all was well; and then, feeling that work would be the best panacea for his loneliness, he threw himself heart and soul into the business of arranging his affairs in a condition to leave when it should be time for him to follow his friends.

Soon after their arrival in Paris, Reginald and Professor Gardiner paid a visit to Monsieur D'Artelle, and handed over to him the proofs of Marguerite's identity as the granddaughter of Monsieur Delavigne.

The attorney appeared to be very much pleased, for they were incontestable, he said.

A little later they were presented in court, when it was decided that she was the only legitimate heir to the Delavigne estate, and immediate possession was granted her.

Marguerite's heritage was a noble one, and with the ample fortune accompanying it, enabled Dr. Alexander and his wife, with Professor Gardiner, to take a high position in the cultivated circles of Paris. Constance, of course, preferred not to mingle in society for a time.

But she was far from being unhappy in her new home. The change was beneficial to her, the load of care and responsibility which had depressed her for so long was removed, and surrounded by love, together with congenial companionship, she was not long in regaining much of her original cheerfulness.

When summer came again Laurence came also, and he wasted no time in learning what his fate was to be, even though Constance's greeting had been cordial enough to assure him that he held a very warm place in her heart.

He frankly asked her to be his wife, and she as frankly confessed her love for him, and promised to marry him when her year of mourning was ended.

Consequently, three months later there was a quiet but elegant wedding in the Chateau Bernous, and immediately afterward the happy couple started upon an extended tour on the Continent.

When they returned to Paris, Reginald urged them to settle there, since there was no especial ties binding

them to America, for he disliked the thought of again being separated from his sister.

This seemed to be Constance's wish also; and purchasing a fine piece of property not far from the chateau, Laurence erected a lovely villa upon it, and for many years the two families resided side by side, the happiest relations existing between them.

Professor Gardiner thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful studio which Marguerite gave up entirely to him, and lived long enough to write several books in it, while in all respects his home was an ideal one with the lovely daughter who was tenderly devoted to him.

Jennette and her good husband Pierre were overjoyed upon learning that the daughter of their own Mademoiselle Marguerite was to reign as mistress in the home of her ancestors, and while they lived they yielded her most loving service.

Marguerite made a most loving wife and mother, for three children were given to her—two noble boys, William Gardiner and Laurence Everet, besides a charming little fairy whom they named Constance; and this promising trio were the pride of their fond parents' hearts.

In Reginald's eyes his wife, who had experienced love after marriage, is still the "most beautiful woman he has ever seen," while in Marguerite's estimation no grander man than her husband ever lived; so hand in hand they tread the path of life without a cloud to mar their perfect love for and confidence in each other.

[THE END.]

